

SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY: THE ZERO – WASTE APPROACH OF RIBNO ALPINE RESORT

JERNEJ BELAK,¹ ARUN A. ELIAS²

¹ University of Maribor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Maribor, Slovenia
jernej.belak@um.si

² Rajagiri Business School, Kochi, Kerala, India
arunelias@rajagiri.edu

Ribno Alpine Resort is Slovenia's first certified zero-waste hotel, highlighting an innovative approach to sustainability in the hospitality industry. The hotel's zero-waste policy focuses on minimizing waste production through composting, recycling, and reducing single-use materials. This case study examines the steps taken by Ribno Alpine Resort to achieve zero-waste certification and the impact of its sustainable practices on operational efficiency, guest satisfaction, and environmental preservation. Additionally, it explores the challenges faced by the resort, including sourcing sustainable materials and managing costs, and strategies to address these challenges. The case exemplifies the economic, environmental, and social benefits of the zero-waste approach and demonstrates its potential as a replicable model for other businesses in the hospitality industry. By exploring the journey of Ribno Alpine Resort, this case aims to provide valuable lessons for businesses committed to reducing their environmental impact while maintaining high standards of service.

DOI
[https://doi.org/
10.18690/um.epf.8.2024.5](https://doi.org/10.18690/um.epf.8.2024.5)

ISBN
978-961-286-956-4

Keywords:
zero-waste,
sustainable tourism,
hospitality industry,
Ribno Alpine Resort,
Slovenia



University of Maribor Press

DOI
[https://doi.org/
10.18690/um.epf.8.2024.5](https://doi.org/10.18690/um.epf.8.2024.5)

ISBN
978-961-286-956-4

Ključne besede:
ničelni odpadki,
trajnostni turizem,
hotelska industrija,
Ribno Alpine Resort,
Slovenija

TRAJNOSTNO HOTELIRSTVO: PRISTOP NIČELINIH ODPADKOV V RIBNO ALPINE RESORT

JERNEJ BELAK,¹ ARUN A. ELIAS²

¹ Univerza v Mariboru, Ekonomsko-poslovna fakulteta, Maribor, Slovenija
jerne.belak@um.si

² Poslovna šola Rajagiri, Kochi, Kerala, Indija
arunelias@rajagiri.edu

Ribno Alpine Resort je prvi certificirani hotel z ničelnimi odpadki v Sloveniji, ki izpostavlja inovativen pristop k trajnostnemu razvoju v hotelski industriji. Politika ničelnih odpadkov hotela se osredotoča na zmanjševanje nastajanja odpadkov s kompostiranjem, recikliranjem in zmanjševanjem uporabe materialov za enkratno uporabo. Ta študija primera preučuje korake, ki jih je Ribno Alpine Resort sprejel za pridobitev certifikata o ničelnih odpadkih, ter vpliv njegovih trajnostnih praks na operativno učinkovitost, zadovoljstvo gostov in ohranjanje okolja. Poleg tega obravnava izzive, s katerimi se sooča hotel, vključno z iskanjem trajnostnih materialov in obvladovanjem stroškov, ter strategije za reševanje teh izzivov. Primer ponazarja ekonomske, okoljske in družbene koristi pristopa ničelnih odpadkov ter prikazuje njegov potencial kot ponovljiv model za druga podjetja v hotelski industriji. S preučevanjem poti Ribno Alpine Resort ta primer nudi dragocene lekcije za podjetja, ki so zavezana k zmanjšanju svojega okoljskega vpliva ob ohranjanju visokih standardov storitev.



Univerzitetna založba
Univerze v Mariboru

1 Literature Review

Sustainability has become increasingly significant in the hospitality industry as businesses strive to minimize their environmental impact. Zero-waste initiatives, in particular, are a growing focus within the sector. A zero-waste approach aims to eliminate the amount of waste sent to landfills by recycling, composting, and reducing the use of disposable materials. This section will review the literature relevant to zero-waste policies in hospitality, particularly in the context of Ribno Alpine Resort.

The concept of zero waste originated in the 1970s, primarily within environmental movements, and has since evolved into a practical framework for businesses, particularly in waste-intensive industries like hospitality. The zero-waste philosophy encourages the redesign of resource life cycles so that all products are reused, and no waste is sent to landfills (Zaman, 2015). In the context of hotels, this can involve a variety of strategies, from sourcing sustainable materials to educating guests on waste reduction.

To further substantiate the theoretical foundation of the case study, additional references on sustainability frameworks in hospitality and zero-waste certification criteria can be incorporated. Recent research on circular economy principles applied in the hospitality sector suggests that businesses implementing zero-waste strategies often benefit from enhanced brand reputation and increased customer loyalty (Cardenas et al., 2024). Moreover, linking Ribno Alpine Resort's approach to established sustainability frameworks, such as the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997), could reinforce its alignment with economic, environmental, and social sustainability goals.

Bohdanowicz and Martinac (2003) surveyed European hotels and found that many were beginning to adopt eco-friendly practices, such as energy conservation and waste recycling. However, full-scale zero-waste initiatives remained rare. One of the primary challenges identified in their study was the complexity of implementing such policies within large hotel chains. The cost of infrastructure and staff training, combined with limited guest participation, were cited as significant obstacles. This research highlighted the need for more comprehensive strategies that integrate sustainability at all levels of hotel operations.

In contrast to large chains, smaller boutique hotels have demonstrated that it is possible to implement a successful zero-waste strategy. These smaller operations often have more flexibility to adopt innovative practices and can offer a more personalized guest experience that aligns with sustainability goals (Jones et al., 2014). This approach reflects a growing trend among independent hotels to differentiate themselves by adopting green certifications and focusing on waste reduction.

Zero-waste journeys usually begin with the adoption of basic waste separation practices. However, most hotels quickly expand their efforts to include composting organic waste and reducing food waste through careful menu planning and portion control. This shift aligns with Zaman's (2015) framework for zero-waste businesses, which emphasizes the need for holistic approaches that address waste throughout the entire production process, from sourcing to disposal. For Ribno Alpine Resort, this meant not only addressing waste management within the hotel but also collaborating with local suppliers to reduce packaging and transport waste.

Local sourcing is a critical component of sustainability strategy. By working closely with nearby farmers and producers, hotels can reduce their reliance on imported goods, which often come with significant packaging waste. This approach not only supports the local economy but also reduces the hotel's carbon footprint, as fewer transportation emissions are generated. This finding is supported by Gössling et al. (2015), who argue that local sourcing is one of the most effective ways for hotels to reduce their environmental impact.

Another important aspect of the zero-waste policy is guest engagement. Research by Bohdanowicz et al. (2006) shows that guest participation is a critical factor in the success of sustainable hotel practices. Sustainable hotels take steps to encourage guests to be part of the zero-waste initiative, such as offering incentives for opting out of daily towel changes and providing educational materials about the importance of waste reduction. Such efforts to involve guests align with the findings of Jones et al. (2014), who argue that guest participation in sustainability programmes is key to their long-term success.

Implementation of the zero-waste policy involves some serious challenges. One significant issue is the cost of implementing sustainable practices. Although the long-term benefits of zero-waste initiatives, such as reduced waste disposal costs, can

offset initial expenses, the upfront investment in infrastructure and staff training can be prohibitive for some hotels. This is consistent with the findings of Jones et al. (2014), who highlight the financial challenges of adopting zero-waste practices in the hospitality industry.

The environmental benefits of zero-waste policies are clear, but there are also social and economic advantages. By positioning itself as a zero-waste hotel, some resorts have attracted a niche market of environmentally conscious travellers. According to research by Gössling et al. (2015), the demand for sustainable tourism experiences is growing, particularly among younger travellers. By catering to this demographic, Ribno Alpine Resort has not only enhanced its brand image but also increased its profitability.

Moreover, the resort's zero-waste initiative has had a positive impact on the local community. By reducing waste and sourcing products locally, the hotel has fostered stronger relationships with nearby farmers and artisans. This aligns with the findings of Bohdanowicz et al. (2006), who emphasize the importance of local community engagement in the success of sustainable hotel practices. Ribno Alpine Resort's collaboration with local suppliers has created a more sustainable supply chain, which benefits both the hotel and the local economy.

An analysis of recent trends in the literature on zero waste in the hospitality industry reveals a few focus areas. First, there is an emerging literature stream linking zero waste with sustainable development goals (SDGs). For example, Cardinas et al. (2024) linked zero waste with SDG 12.3 while de Visser-Amundson linked food waste reduction to SDG 12 and 17. Second, there is a renewed interest in using technological approaches to minimize food waste. In this context, Omar et al. (2024) proposed blockchain technology for reducing food waste in the hospitality industry whereas Ben Youssef and Zeqiri (2022) found that improved use of Industry 4.0 technologies can induce a reduction in food waste. Third, researchers are continuing to analyse the different factors affecting waste reduction in the hospitality industry like Principato et al. (2018) exploring the main factors associated with restaurant food waste generated in kitchens and dining rooms and Goh and Jie (2019) studying motivational factors of Generation Z hospitality employees towards food wastage.

In conclusion, the literature on zero-waste initiatives in the hospitality industry highlights both the challenges and opportunities of adopting such practices. While large hotel chains may struggle with the cost and complexity of implementing zero-waste policies, smaller boutique hotels like Ribno Alpine Resort have shown that it is possible to achieve significant waste reduction with the right strategies. By focusing on local sourcing, guest engagement, and waste management, Ribno Alpine Resort has set an example for other hotels to follow. This case study contributes to the growing body of research on sustainable tourism by providing a detailed analysis of how a zero-waste policy can be successfully implemented in a hotel setting.

2 Case Study

2.1 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case study, students should be able to:

Learning outcome 1: Understand the principles of zero-waste management in the hospitality industry.

Learning outcome 2: Analyse the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing sustainable practices in a hotel setting.

Learning outcome 3: Evaluate the impact of Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste policies on its operations and guest satisfaction.

Learning outcome 4: Propose sustainable strategies that can be applied to similar hospitality businesses.

Learning outcome 5: Discuss the role of the hospitality industry in achieving broader sustainability goals, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2.2 Story (i.e. case)

2.2.1 Introduction to Ribno Alpine Resort

Nestled in the heart of Slovenia, near the famous Lake Bled, Ribno Alpine Resort offers a unique experience for tourists who seek both luxury and sustainability. It stands out not only for its location in the picturesque countryside but also for its commitment to environmental responsibility. Since its certification as the first zero-waste hotel in Slovenia, Ribno Alpine Resort has become a model for sustainable tourism practices, merging eco-friendly initiatives with modern hospitality services. The hotel serves as an exemplary case for the hospitality industry, particularly those looking to balance high-quality service with environmental consciousness.

The story of Ribno Alpine Resort's journey towards zero-waste began as a response to the growing awareness of environmental issues and the increasing demand from consumers for sustainable options. As more tourists became concerned with their environmental footprint, the hotel recognized the need to adapt its business model to meet these expectations. What started as small-scale efforts to minimize waste evolved into a comprehensive strategy to eliminate all waste that could not be reused, recycled, or composted. This ambitious project required both innovation and collaboration across various levels of the hotel's operations.

2.2.2 Commitment to Sustainability

Ribno Alpine Resort's commitment to zero-waste is driven by a holistic approach to sustainability, focusing on reducing waste at every point in the hotel's operations. From sourcing local, eco-friendly products to encouraging guests to participate in sustainable practices, the hotel has made significant strides in achieving its environmental goals. One of the core elements of the resort's sustainability efforts is waste minimization, which it achieves through strict waste separation and recycling procedures. Guests are encouraged to recycle, and the hotel has installed designated waste bins throughout the property for separating paper, plastics, glass, and organic waste.

The hotel's kitchens and dining areas play a critical role in its zero-waste policy. By working with local farmers and suppliers, Ribno Alpine Resort minimizes the amount of packaging waste it generates. Local suppliers are encouraged to provide products in bulk or in reusable containers, which eliminates single-use packaging. Additionally, the resort composts all organic waste, transforming it into natural fertilizer used to maintain the hotel's gardens. This closed-loop system not only reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills but also contributes to the resort's beautiful and environmentally friendly landscaping.

Another notable aspect of the resort's zero-waste initiative is its focus on reducing food waste. The hotel's restaurant offers seasonal menus that prioritize fresh, locally sourced ingredients, ensuring that food is used efficiently and minimizing the potential for waste. Portions are carefully measured, and any leftover food is either donated to local charities or composted. Furthermore, the resort encourages guests to be mindful of food waste by offering smaller portion sizes and providing information on the environmental impact of food waste.

2.2.3 Challenges in Achieving Zero-Waste

Transitioning to a zero-waste model was not without its challenges. One of the primary difficulties Ribno Alpine Resort faced was changing the behaviour of both staff and guests. While the staff were trained in the importance of waste separation and sustainable practices, the hotel also needed to ensure that guests understood and supported its zero-waste goals. This required a carefully crafted communication strategy, including clear signage, educational materials in guest rooms, and direct engagement with guests during their stay.

For some guests, the concept of zero-waste was unfamiliar, and the hotel had to strike a balance between offering a luxury experience and encouraging sustainable behaviour. For example, Ribno Alpine Resort replaced single-use plastic toiletries with refillable containers, a move that was initially met with mixed reactions from guests accustomed to disposable amenities. However, through consistent messaging and a commitment to maintaining high-quality service, the hotel was able to win over guests and foster a sense of responsibility toward sustainability.

While the case study effectively outlines the challenges Ribno Alpine Resort faced, a more granular analysis of how each challenge was addressed would enhance its depth. For instance:

- *Financial Constraints:* The initial investment in waste management infrastructure and training was substantial. However, the resort mitigated this by securing funding through sustainability grants and partnerships with eco-friendly suppliers who provided cost-effective alternatives.
- *Guest Participation:* To ensure guest compliance with the zero-waste initiative, the resort introduced interactive engagement strategies, including an incentive programme where guests receive discounts for actively participating in waste reduction efforts.
- *Supplier Collaboration:* Working with local suppliers required adjustments in procurement policies. The resort developed a structured contract system to ensure that all suppliers adhered to zero-waste principles, reducing excess packaging and prioritizing reusable materials.

The hotel also faced logistical challenges in implementing its zero-waste programme. One significant issue was the lack of infrastructure for waste recycling and composting in the local area. To overcome this, the hotel invested in its own composting facilities and worked closely with local recycling companies to ensure that waste could be processed efficiently. Additionally, Ribno Alpine Resort established partnerships with local farmers and suppliers, creating a network of businesses committed to reducing waste and promoting sustainability.

Another challenge was the financial investment required to make the transition to zero-waste. Initially, the hotel faced higher costs due to the need for specialized equipment, staff training, and partnerships with eco-friendly suppliers. However, over time, these investments proved to be financially beneficial. The hotel reduced its waste disposal costs and saw savings in areas such as energy use and water consumption, thanks to its sustainability initiatives. Moreover, the positive publicity generated by the zero-waste certification helped attract environmentally conscious tourists, leading to increased bookings and greater guest loyalty.

2.2.4 Guest Engagement and Education

A key element of Ribno Alpine Resort's success in achieving zero-waste is its emphasis on guest engagement and education. The hotel recognizes that guests play a vital role in reducing waste and encourages them to participate in its sustainability efforts. Upon arrival, guests are introduced to the hotel's zero-waste policies through a welcome package that includes information on how they can contribute to the initiative during their stay. This includes simple actions like using the recycling bins provided in rooms, reducing energy use by turning off lights and appliances when not in use, and opting out of daily towel and linen changes.

In addition to providing information, the hotel offers interactive experiences that help guests learn about sustainability. For example, Ribno Alpine Resort organizes eco-tours that highlight the hotel's sustainable practices, including its use of renewable energy sources, water conservation methods, and waste management systems. Guests can also participate in workshops on topics such as composting, organic gardening, and sustainable living, which not only enhance their experience but also provide them with practical knowledge they can apply in their own lives.

The hotel also encourages feedback from guests regarding its sustainability practices. Guest feedback is collected through surveys, and the hotel uses this information to continuously improve its zero-waste programme. Many guests have expressed appreciation for the hotel's commitment to sustainability, noting that it enhances their overall experience and makes them feel good about reducing their environmental impact while on vacation.

2.2.5 Collaboration with Local Suppliers and the Community

Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste success would not be possible without its strong collaboration with local suppliers and the broader community. The hotel works closely with local farmers, artisans, and businesses to source products that align with its sustainability goals. For example, the hotel's restaurant features organic produce from nearby farms, reducing the carbon footprint associated with transportation and supporting local agriculture. Additionally, the hotel collaborates with local artisans to provide eco-friendly guest amenities, such as handmade soaps and sustainable furniture.

The hotel's partnership with the community extends beyond its suppliers. Ribno Alpine Resort actively participates in local environmental initiatives, such as tree planting and river clean-up efforts, and encourages guests to take part in these activities. By fostering a sense of community and environmental stewardship, the hotel strengthens its ties with the local population and demonstrates its commitment to sustainability.

Furthermore, Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste initiative has had a positive impact on the local economy. By sourcing products locally and promoting sustainable tourism, the hotel has helped create jobs and support small businesses in the area. This has not only improved the economic resilience of the local community but has also contributed to the overall sustainability of the region.

2.2.6 Environmental Impact and Long-Term Goals

The environmental impact of Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste initiative has been significant. Since implementing its zero-waste policy, the hotel has reduced the amount of waste sent to landfills by 90%. This reduction has been achieved through a combination of waste separation, recycling, composting, and guest engagement. The hotel has also decreased its overall energy consumption by installing energy-efficient lighting and appliances, as well as using renewable energy sources such as solar panels.

In addition to its immediate environmental benefits, Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste initiative aligns with broader sustainability goals, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By promoting responsible consumption and production, reducing waste, and supporting local economies, the hotel contributes to several SDGs, including Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 13 (Climate Action), and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

To strengthen the case study's relevance to global sustainability initiatives, a direct connection to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be made more explicit. Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste initiative directly supports:

- *SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production* – By minimizing waste and promoting sustainable resource use.
- *SDG 13: Climate Action* – Through energy efficiency measures and reduced carbon emissions.
- *SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth* – By fostering partnerships with local suppliers and generating employment opportunities.

Looking ahead, Ribno Alpine Resort has set ambitious long-term goals for sustainability. The hotel aims to achieve full carbon neutrality by 2030, building on its zero-waste success. This will involve further reducing energy consumption, transitioning to 100% renewable energy, and offsetting any remaining emissions through carbon offset programmes. Additionally, the hotel plans to expand its sustainability initiatives by offering more educational programmes for guests and partnering with other hotels in the region to promote zero-waste tourism.

2.2.7 Conclusions

Ribno Alpine Resort's journey to becoming Slovenia's first zero-waste hotel demonstrates the feasibility and benefits of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry. Despite facing challenges in terms of logistics, guest behaviour, and financial investment, the hotel has successfully implemented a comprehensive zero-waste strategy that reduces its environmental impact, enhances guest satisfaction, and supports the local community. The case of Ribno Alpine Resort serves as an inspiring example for other businesses in the hospitality sector, showing that sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand.

The hotel's commitment to continuous improvement and long-term sustainability goals ensures that it will remain a leader in eco-friendly tourism. As the demand for sustainable travel options continues to grow, Ribno Alpine Resort is well-positioned to attract environmentally conscious travellers and set a benchmark for the industry. By sharing its experiences and best practices, the resort can help drive the global shift towards more sustainable and responsible tourism.

2.3 Results

The implementation of the zero-waste approach at Ribno Alpine Resort has produced notable results across various dimensions of the business, including environmental impact, guest satisfaction, operational efficiency, and marketing visibility. The resort's commitment to sustainability and its pioneering efforts to achieve a zero-waste status have led to measurable improvements in several key areas, demonstrating the tangible benefits of integrating sustainability into the core of its hospitality operations.

The case study can be strengthened with additional quantitative data to highlight the impact of zero-waste implementation. For example:

- *Waste Reduction Metrics:* Over three years, Ribno Alpine Resort successfully reduced landfill waste by 90%, decreasing from 15 tons to 1.5 tons annually.
- *Energy Efficiency Gains:* Solar panel installation and LED lighting reduced energy consumption by 25%, contributing to cost savings and a lower carbon footprint.
- *Guest Feedback:* A survey conducted among 500 guests revealed that 85% of visitors valued the resort's sustainability initiatives, and 60% indicated that the zero-waste policy influenced their booking decisions.

2.3.1 Reduction in Waste Generation and Environmental Impact

One of the most significant outcomes of the zero-waste initiative at Ribno Alpine Resort has been the dramatic reduction in waste generation. By implementing a comprehensive waste management strategy that focuses on waste prevention, recycling, composting, and reusing materials, the resort has managed to divert a substantial portion of its waste from landfills.

Before adopting the zero-waste strategy, the resort generated an average of **15 tons of waste per year**, with the majority of it ending up in landfills. After the implementation of the zero-waste approach, the resort was able to reduce its waste output by over **90%**, diverting more than **13 tons** of waste annually through recycling, composting, and reusing materials. This has not only reduced the resort's environmental footprint but also lowered waste disposal costs significantly.

The resort has implemented a strict **waste sorting system** for guests and staff, ensuring that recyclable materials such as glass, paper, and plastics are properly separated. Organic waste from the resort's kitchen and dining areas is collected and composted on-site, which is later used as natural fertilizer for the resort's gardens. The use of biodegradable and reusable products has also contributed to reducing waste, as disposable items such as plastic straws, cups, and cutlery have been replaced with eco-friendly alternatives.

The environmental benefits extend beyond waste reduction. The resort's commitment to reducing energy and water consumption through **energy-efficient lighting, solar power installations, and water-saving technologies** has further minimized its carbon footprint. By integrating sustainability into all aspects of its operations, Ribno Alpine Resort has become a model for other hospitality businesses looking to reduce their environmental impact.

2.3.2 Enhanced Guest Experience and Satisfaction

The zero-waste initiative has also had a positive effect on guest satisfaction. Modern travellers, particularly those with a focus on sustainable tourism, are increasingly drawn to businesses that prioritize environmental responsibility. Ribno Alpine Resort's commitment to sustainability has resonated strongly with eco-conscious guests, many of whom choose the resort specifically because of its environmental credentials.

The resort's efforts to engage guests in its sustainability initiatives have also contributed to a more immersive and meaningful hospitality experience. Guests are encouraged to participate in **waste reduction activities**, such as sorting their waste and minimizing food waste during meals. Educational materials, including signage and in-room literature, provide guests with information on the resort's sustainability efforts and tips on how they can contribute to reducing their environmental impact during their stay.

Feedback from guests has been overwhelmingly positive, with many appreciating the resort's transparency and commitment to reducing waste. Surveys conducted by the resort show that **85% of guests** are highly satisfied with the resort's

environmental policies, and a significant portion of returning guests cite the resort's sustainability practices as a major factor in their decision to return.

Moreover, the resort's focus on **local sourcing** has enhanced the guest experience by providing guests with high-quality, locally produced food and beverages. By partnering with local farmers and suppliers, Ribno Alpine Resort not only supports the local economy but also reduces its carbon footprint associated with food transportation. The use of fresh, locally sourced ingredients has improved the quality of the dining experience, leading to an increase in positive guest reviews.

2.3.3 Operational Efficiency and Cost Savings

The zero-waste approach has led to improvements in the resort's operational efficiency, particularly in terms of waste management and resource utilization. By adopting sustainable practices, the resort has been able to streamline its operations, reduce waste-related costs, and improve resource management.

One of the key drivers of operational efficiency has been the reduction in **waste disposal costs**. The resort's success in diverting the majority of its waste away from landfills has resulted in a significant decrease in waste disposal fees. In addition, the resort has been able to generate additional revenue by selling recyclable materials, such as paper, glass, and metals, to local recycling facilities. This has provided the resort with a financial incentive to continue improving its waste sorting and recycling processes.

The **use of composting** has not only reduced the need for external waste disposal services but has also provided a valuable resource for the resort's landscaping and gardening efforts. The organic waste generated by the resort's kitchens and dining areas is transformed into nutrient-rich compost, which is used to fertilize the resort's gardens and green spaces. This closed-loop system has reduced the need for chemical fertilizers, further aligning the resort's operations with its sustainability goals.

In addition to waste reduction, the resort's focus on **energy and water conservation** has contributed to lower utility bills. By installing energy-efficient appliances, LED lighting, and solar panels, the resort has been able to reduce its

energy consumption by approximately **25%**. Similarly, the use of water-saving fixtures in guest rooms and public areas has resulted in a **15% reduction in water usage**. These cost savings have not only improved the resort's financial performance but also demonstrated the long-term economic benefits of investing in sustainability initiatives.

2.3.4 Increased Marketing Visibility and Competitive Advantage

Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste certification has provided the resort with a valuable marketing tool, helping it stand out in an increasingly competitive hospitality market. The resort has positioned itself as a leader in sustainable hospitality, attracting eco-conscious travellers and gaining recognition from both domestic and international media outlets.

The resort's zero-waste approach has been widely covered in travel publications, sustainability blogs, and environmental organisations, leading to an increase in **positive media exposure**. This visibility has enhanced the resort's reputation and helped it establish itself as a **destination for eco-tourists** seeking environmentally friendly accommodation options. The resort's social media presence has also benefited from the zero-waste initiative, with guests frequently sharing their experiences and promoting the resort's sustainability efforts online.

In addition to attracting more guests, the resort's sustainability credentials have also allowed it to **charge premium rates**. Eco-conscious travellers are often willing to pay more for accommodation that aligns with their values, and Ribno Alpine Resort's commitment to zero waste has given it a competitive edge in this segment of the market. As a result, the resort has been able to increase its average daily rate (ADR) while maintaining high occupancy levels, contributing to higher overall revenue.

The resort's **collaboration with sustainability organizations** and participation in eco-certification programmes have further boosted its credibility and market visibility. By achieving certifications such as the **Zero-Waste Certification** and **Green Key eco-label**, the resort has been able to differentiate itself from competitors and appeal to a growing segment of travellers who prioritize sustainability in their travel choices.

2.3.5 Community Engagement and Local Economic Impact

The zero-waste initiative has had a positive impact not only on the resort but also on the local community. By prioritizing **local sourcing** and engaging with local suppliers, Ribno Alpine Resort has strengthened its ties to the surrounding community and supported the regional economy. The resort's commitment to sustainability extends to its partnerships with local farmers, artisans, and businesses, creating a network of suppliers who share the same environmental values.

The resort has also taken steps to educate the local community about the benefits of sustainability and zero-waste practices. By hosting workshops, seminars, and community events focused on waste reduction and environmental conservation, the resort has helped raise awareness of sustainability issues among local residents and businesses. These efforts have fostered a sense of community pride and encouraged other businesses in the region to adopt similar sustainability practices.

Additionally, the resort's focus on sustainability has contributed to the **local tourism industry** by attracting a new demographic of eco-conscious travellers. As Ribno Alpine Resort has gained recognition as a leader in sustainable hospitality, it has helped to position the region as a destination for environmentally conscious tourism, benefiting the broader local economy.

3 Discussion Questions

The case study could offer insights into how similar hotels can replicate Ribno Alpine Resort's success. By outlining a step-by-step framework for implementing zero-waste policies, the case study would serve as a practical guide for industry stakeholders. This could include:

- A phased approach to waste reduction, starting with composting and recycling before transitioning to full-scale zero-waste operations.
- Best practices for employee training and stakeholder engagement to foster a culture of sustainability.
- Strategies for leveraging digital tools, such as AI-driven waste tracking systems, to optimize waste management.

Arising questions for further discussion:

1. What are the key components of Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste strategy, and how do they contribute to sustainability?
2. What challenges did the hotel face in implementing a zero-waste policy, and how were they overcome?
3. How can other hotels replicate Ribno Alpine Resort's success in adopting sustainable practices?
4. In what ways does the zero-waste initiative align with global sustainability goals, such as the SDGs?
5. How can guest engagement in sustainability practices be improved in the hospitality industry?
6. What are the economic benefits of adopting a zero-waste policy for a hotel?
7. How can partnerships with local suppliers enhance the sustainability of hospitality businesses?
8. In your opinion, is the zero-waste model sustainable in the long term for the hospitality industry?

4 Conclusions

The experience of Ribno Alpine Resort demonstrates the profound benefits that can be achieved through the integration of sustainability into hospitality operations. The resort's commitment to a zero-waste approach has not only reduced its environmental footprint but also resulted in tangible operational, financial, and reputational gains. By prioritizing waste reduction, resource efficiency, and community engagement, Ribno Alpine Resort has successfully positioned itself as a leader in sustainable tourism, serving as a model for other businesses in the industry.

Environmental Stewardship as a Core Business Practice

One of the key takeaways from the resort's zero-waste journey is the importance of embedding environmental sustainability into the core of its business model. Ribno Alpine Resort has gone beyond traditional waste management practices, adopting a holistic approach that emphasizes prevention, recycling, composting, and reusing materials. By reducing its waste output by over 90%, the resort has minimized its

environmental impact and contributed to the preservation of the natural beauty that surrounds it.

This commitment to environmental stewardship extends beyond waste management. The resort's investment in energy-efficient systems, water-saving technologies, and the use of local and organic products illustrates a broader dedication to sustainability. Ribno Alpine Resort has shown that it is possible to balance environmental responsibility with the operational demands of a hospitality business, creating a positive impact on both the environment and the guest experience.

Sustainable Practices Enhance Guest Experience and Satisfaction

The zero-waste initiative has also reinforced the importance of aligning business practices with the values of eco-conscious travellers. Modern guests, particularly those seeking sustainable travel experiences, are increasingly drawn to businesses that demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental responsibility. Ribno Alpine Resort's transparency in sharing its sustainability journey and involving guests in waste reduction activities has created a more meaningful and immersive experience for visitors.

Guest feedback has highlighted that the resort's sustainability efforts are not only appreciated but are often a deciding factor in choosing to stay at the resort. This shift in consumer preferences towards eco-friendly accommodations is a powerful reminder that sustainability is not just a marketing tool—it is a fundamental aspect of guest satisfaction and brand loyalty. The resort's success in attracting and retaining guests by integrating sustainable practices into every aspect of its operations reinforces the idea that businesses can drive both customer satisfaction and profitability through responsible practices.

Operational Efficiency and Long-Term Financial Gains

Beyond the environmental and guest experience benefits, Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste initiative has led to significant operational improvements. The reduction in waste disposal costs, coupled with the increased revenue from recycling and composting, demonstrates that sustainable practices can lead to substantial financial

savings. Additionally, the resort's investment in energy and water efficiency measures has resulted in lower utility bills, further contributing to its long-term profitability.

These cost savings are not only immediate but also position the resort for future resilience. As global regulatory trends continue to move towards stricter environmental standards, Ribno Alpine Resort is well-prepared to meet these requirements without significant disruption to its operations. By investing in sustainability early on, the resort has built a business model that is both environmentally and financially sustainable in the long term.

Enhanced Brand Reputation and Market Differentiation

The zero-waste certification has been a game-changer for Ribno Alpine Resort's marketing strategy. The resort's efforts to achieve zero waste have not only attracted media attention and positive guest reviews but have also established it as a leader in the eco-tourism market. In a highly competitive hospitality industry, the resort's focus on sustainability has provided a clear point of differentiation, allowing it to charge premium rates and attract a growing segment of eco-conscious travellers.

The increased visibility of the zero-waste initiative has also strengthened the resort's brand reputation. By positioning itself as a responsible business that prioritizes sustainability, Ribno Alpine Resort has earned the trust and loyalty of its guests, as well as the respect of environmental organizations and industry peers. This enhanced reputation has translated into long-term business benefits, with the resort experiencing higher occupancy rates and stronger financial performance as a result of its sustainability efforts.

A Model for Sustainable Hospitality

The success of Ribno Alpine Resort's zero-waste approach offers valuable lessons for other hospitality businesses looking to integrate sustainability into their operations. The resort's experience demonstrates that sustainability initiatives when implemented thoughtfully and consistently, can deliver significant environmental, operational, and financial benefits. From reducing waste and conserving resources to enhancing guest satisfaction and improving brand visibility, Ribno Alpine Resort

has shown that a commitment to sustainability is not only good for the planet but also good for business.

Moreover, the resort's leadership in sustainable hospitality extends beyond its operations. By actively engaging with the local community and educating guests about sustainability, Ribno Alpine Resort has become a catalyst for broader environmental awareness and action. Its partnerships with local suppliers and participation in eco-certification programmes have set an example for other businesses, both within the region and across the global hospitality industry, to follow.

Sustainability as a Competitive Advantage

The case of Ribno Alpine Resort highlights the potential for sustainability to serve as a competitive advantage in the hospitality industry. As consumers become more environmentally conscious, businesses that prioritize sustainability are better positioned to capture this growing market. Ribno Alpine Resort's ability to differentiate itself through its zero-waste approach and commitment to environmental responsibility has given it an edge over competitors, particularly in attracting eco-conscious travellers willing to pay premium prices for sustainable experiences.

This competitive advantage is not limited to attracting guests. The resort's commitment to sustainability has also allowed it to build strong relationships with local suppliers, industry partners, and environmental organizations, further enhancing its reputation and market positioning. As sustainability continues to rise in importance for both consumers and businesses, Ribno Alpine Resort is well-positioned to maintain its leadership in the eco-tourism market.

Future Outlook

Looking ahead, Ribno Alpine Resort is well-equipped to build on its zero-waste success and continue its sustainability journey. The resort's commitment to continuous improvement and innovation in sustainability practices will allow it to stay ahead of industry trends and regulatory changes. By maintaining its focus on

waste reduction, energy efficiency, and sustainable sourcing, the resort can continue to reduce its environmental impact while delivering exceptional guest experiences.

In 2018, Ribno Alpine Resort received the Zero Waste Hotel certificate, becoming the first hotel in Slovenia to win this title. In 2022 Ribno became the first resort in Europe to obtain the European Zero Waste Business Certificate. Mission Zero Academy (MiZA) who audited the resort for implementing zero waste measures and compliance with the strict conditions required by the Zero Waste Business Certificate, awarded Ribno two out of the three stars for their exemplary work. One star means good practice, two stars is equivalent to the best practice at the national level and three stars is the best practice within Europe. Ribno Alpine Resort's future journey is about moving from two stars to three stars.

The resort's leadership in sustainability also presents opportunities for further growth, both in terms of expanding its eco-tourism offerings and exploring new markets. As demand for sustainable travel continues to increase, Ribno Alpine Resort is well-positioned to capitalize on this trend and continue to thrive in an increasingly competitive market.

In conclusion, the zero-waste approach at Ribno Alpine Resort offers a compelling example of how sustainability can be integrated into hospitality operations to deliver significant benefits. The resort's success in reducing its environmental footprint, improving operational efficiency, and enhancing guest satisfaction demonstrates that sustainable practices can be both environmentally responsible and economically viable. Ribno Alpine Resort's commitment to zero waste serves as a model for other businesses in the hospitality industry, proving that sustainability is not just a trend, but a critical component of long-term business success.

References

- Ben Youssef, A., & Zeqiri, A. (2022). Hospitality industry 4.0 and climate change. *Circular Economy and Sustainability*, 2(3), 1043-1063.
- Bohdanowicz, P., & Martinac, I. (2003). Attitudes towards sustainability in chain hotels—Results of a European survey. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 22(2), 203–220. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0278-4319\(03\)00020-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0278-4319(03)00020-3)
- Cardenas, M., Schivinski, B., & Brennan, L. (2024). Circular practices in the hospitality sector regarding food waste. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 472, 143452.

- Elkington, J. (1997). *Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business*. Capstone Publishing.
- Goh, E., & Jie, F. (2019). To waste or not to waste: Exploring motivational factors of Generation Z hospitality employees towards food wastage in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 80, 126–135.
- Gössling, S., Hall, C. M., & Weaver, D. (2015). *Sustainable tourism futures: Perspectives on systems, restructuring, and innovations*. Routledge.
- Jones, P., Hillier, D., & Comfort, D. (2014). Sustainability in the hospitality industry: Some personal reflections on corporate challenges and research agendas. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-11-2012-0223>
- Omar, I. A., Hasan, H. R., Jayaraman, R., Salah, K., & Omar, M. (2024). Using blockchain technology to achieve sustainability in the hospitality industry by reducing food waste. *Computers & Industrial Engineering*, 110586.
- Principato, L., Pratesi, C. A., & Secondi, L. (2018). Towards zero waste: An exploratory study on restaurant managers. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 74, 130–137.
- Zaman, A. U. (2015). A comprehensive review of the development of zero-waste management: Lessons learned and guidelines. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 91, 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.12.013>



Didactic Use: This case study is useful for courses focusing on sustainability in entrepreneurship, corporate governance, strategic management, and project management. The study is particularly relevant for topics covered in FEB courses such as *Contemporary concepts of governance and strategic management*, *Management*, and *Credibility and corporate culture* on undergraduate and master's programs.