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GREEN CERTIFICATION AS A MARKETING TOOL: GREEN KEY IN TOURISM AND HOTEL AND RESTAURANT BUSINESS

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Summary. *The article analyzes the role of green certification as a marketing and promotion tool for tourism businesses and the hotel and restaurant sector. Particular attention is paid to the international environmental program Green Key, which sets standards for ecological responsibility and simultaneously serves a marketing function. The study highlights the challenges related to the insufficient awareness of consumers about the significance of green certification and the limited implementation of ecological practices in Ukraine. The author justifies the need to integrate environmental standards into the communication strategies of tourism businesses to build a positive image, enhance consumer trust, and strengthen competitiveness. The potential of green certification is defined as a strategic asset for the post-war recovery of the tourism sector based on environmental responsibility.*

Keywords: *green certification, Green Key, hotel and restaurant business, tour operator, eco-standards, marketing tool, competitive advantages, environmental management.*

Problem Statement. In the current context of global climate change and increasing environmental awareness among consumers, the principles of sustainable development in tourism and the hotel and restaurant industry are becoming increasingly significant. Tourism enterprises are now faced with the challenge of not only adapting to environmental requirements but also finding new ways to enhance their competitiveness and appeal to customers. In this regard, green certification, particularly the international Green Key program, is gaining relevance, as it not only sets environmental standards but also functions as a marketing tool.

Despite the evident advantages of implementing eco-standards, a key problem lies in the insufficient level of consumer awareness regarding the importance of green certification, as well as in the uncertainty surrounding its effectiveness within the communication strategies of tourism enterprises. Furthermore, most Ukrainian hotels are still in the early stages of adopting environmental practices, which hinders the widespread implementation of the Green Key standard.

The relevance of this study stems from the need to explore how green certification can be integrated into hotel and restaurant promotion strategies to

strengthen their unique competitive advantages. In particular, it is important to examine how the presence of a Green Key certificate influences brand perception, trust in service quality, and positioning in the international tourism market. Therefore, there is a pressing need for the scientific substantiation of green certification as a marketing tool and for an assessment of its role in shaping the image of responsible business in the hospitality industry. This is especially important in the context of Ukraine's post-war tourism sector reconstruction, where environmental responsibility can serve as a foundation for rebuilding the trust of both foreign and domestic tourists.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. The issue of implementing green certification in tourism and the hotel and restaurant industry is receiving increasing attention in domestic scientific literature.

A study by Tereshchuk [12] investigates the impact of environmental certification on hotel ratings, emphasizing that the presence of such certification is positively perceived by consumers and contributes to increased competitiveness. Ilnytska-Hykavchuk [8] highlights the low level of eco-standard implementation in Ukraine, attributing it to insufficient governmental support and an underdeveloped regulatory framework.

Andrenko and Vlasova [1] analyze the "Green Key" program, outlining its benefits for hotels as well as the challenges associated with its adaptation in the Ukrainian context.

The practical aspects of introducing green initiatives are illustrated in Pavuk's [10] article, using the cases of the Radisson Blu and Baccara hotels.

Additional insights into certification requirements and standards are available on the Green Key Global platform.

Overall, the relevance of this topic is evidenced by the growing body of research; however, further academic inquiry is required to explore effective mechanisms for implementing green certification practices in Ukraine.

Task Statement. The aim of this study is to substantiate the effectiveness of the Green Key environmental certification as a marketing tool in the tourism and hospitality industry, considering its influence on the development of competitive advantages, enhancement of consumer service quality, and the promotion of an environmentally responsible image for hospitality establishments in Ukraine.

Presentation of the Main Material. Green certification is a formal process that recognizes the compliance of tourism enterprises, including hotel and restaurant businesses, with established environmental standards. These standards regulate the environmental impact, resource efficiency, waste management, biodiversity conservation, energy efficiency, and other aspects of sustainable development.

The Green Key program is an internationally recognized eco-certification initiative operating under the umbrella of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), which holds consultative status with UNESCO and is supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The primary aim of the Green Key program is not only to reduce the environmental footprint of tourist facilities but also to foster environmental awareness among staff, guests and local communities [7].

In the fields of tour operating and hospitality, green certification places emphasis not only on the environmental attributes of the product itself but also on



the entire value chain of tourism services. This includes the selection of suppliers and partners, transport providers, accommodation facilities and food service establishments – all of which must adhere to the principles of sustainable development.

Unlike hotels or restaurants, where direct environmental impacts are evaluated, certification for tour operators typically focuses on:

- The existence and implementation of a corporate sustainability policy;
- Transparency in the selection of suppliers and service partners;
- Providing tourists with information about the ecological footprint of tours;
- Supporting local environmental and social initiatives;
- Monitoring and reporting reductions in CO₂ emissions;
- Avoiding the promotion of environmentally harmful routes.

In this context, initiatives aimed at environmental protection and the promotion of sustainable practices across different sectors play a pivotal role.

One prominent example is the Green Key international eco-certification, which encompasses various domains of the hospitality and tourism industry. This program encourages the integration of environmentally responsible standards in hotels, hostels, campsites, restaurants, and other related establishments.

Typical international environmental standards include [4, 7 and 9]:

- ISO 14001 – Environmental management systems;
- GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) – Global criteria for sustainable tourism;
- EU Ecolabel – The European system for eco-labeling products and services;
- Green Globe, Travelife – Industry-specific eco-certification programs for tourism and hospitality.

The basic requirements for green certification for tour operators and the hotel and restaurant business are presented in Table 1.

Within the framework of green certification, attention is paid not only to environmental performance but also to effective management practices, collaboration with partners, customer communication, and engagement with local communities.

Table 1

Basic requirements for green certification for tour operators and hotel and restaurant businesses

Assessment focus	Basic requirements	Implementation examples
Environmental Management	Availability of a sustainability policy	Implementation of an environmental audit system
Resource Control	Reduction of energy, water, paper consumption	Use of LED lighting
Reporting and Transparency	Public reporting on environmental impact	Annual reports on the company website

[author's development]

Green Key certification is an international eco-label awarded to enterprises that adhere to high standards of sustainable development and environmental responsibility. In Ukraine, this standard has been gradually implemented since 2011, indicating positive dynamics in the development of «green» tourism [7, 10].

Currently, Ukraine demonstrates a steady trend toward the adoption of Green Key environmental certification within the hotel and restaurant sectors. This certification requires not only the implementation of basic energy and water conservation measures, but also the comprehensive integration of sustainable development principles into all aspects of management.

Among the first hotels to receive the Green Key certificate was the Radisson Blu Hotel in Kyiv, which obtained certification in 2011. This establishment became a pioneer in the field of environmental management in Ukraine. It introduced the “Responsible Business” program, which encompasses energy conservation measures, as well as ethical standards for personnel, suppliers, and consumers. Particular attention is paid to resource control, carbon emission reduction and the involvement of employees in eco-educational initiatives [10].

In 2024, Holiday Inn Kyiv, part of the international IHG chain, received Green Key certification. The hotel operates within the framework of a 10-year sustainable development strategy titled Journey to Tomorrow, based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The initiative emphasizes social inclusion, energy efficiency, reuse of materials, and food waste reduction [3].

Another illustrative example is IBIS City Center in Kyiv, which received certification in 2023. This case is particularly notable because the hotel implemented its environmental program during a full-scale war. Key initiatives include reducing water and electricity consumption and ensuring safe conditions for both guests and staff. IBIS successfully adapted the Green Key standard to challenging conditions, thereby demonstrating the resilience and flexibility of the certification system [6].

Small hotels of the Maison Blanche chain also deserve special attention, having actively implemented environmental practices since 2012. Their strategy focuses on the use of local and organic products, reduction of plastic consumption, and the engagement of guests in conscious resource usage. These hotels also utilize environmentally friendly cleaning agents and practice waste separation, which remains a rare phenomenon among small private establishments in Ukraine [5].

The Reikartz Hotels chain, with establishments in Lviv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Dnipro, and other cities, introduced an energy-saving policy as early as 2012.

In particular, these hotels have installed energy-efficient lighting systems, automatic temperature regulators, modern water filtration units, and containers for separate waste collection. Furthermore, Reikartz has implemented an internal food quality control system that helps minimize food waste [11].

A modern example of eco-friendly construction is represented by the Glacier Premium Apartments in Bukovel, certified in 2025. The hotel was built with ecological design in mind: energy-efficient materials were used, geothermal heating systems and biological wastewater treatment were implemented, and environmental awareness programs for guests were launched [2].

A distinct niche is occupied by the Baccara Art Hotel in Kyiv, located on the water. Certified in 2011, this hotel has implemented a water resource monitoring system, reduced the use of single-use plastics, and actively promotes eco-educational activities among its clientele [10].

Table 2 presents specific examples of hotels that have already obtained certification.



The analysis of the aforementioned examples reveals several common trends in the implementation of environmentally oriented management:

- Chain hotels (Radisson Blu, Holiday Inn, IBIS) prioritize the integration of sustainable practices into global corporate social responsibility programs [10, 3, 6].
- Small establishments (Maison Blanche, Glacier Apartments) emphasize local initiatives, including the use of regional products, active guest engagement, and flexible operational approaches [2, 5].
- Reikartz Hotels illustrates a strategy of eco-management standardization at the regional level [11].

All of these hotels – regardless of their size, location, or ownership – share a common feature: a systematic approach to environmental protection that aligns with the criteria of the international Green Key program. These practices not only enhance the competitiveness of the establishments but also reflect the readiness of the Ukrainian tourism sector to adapt to the emerging challenges of sustainable development.

Table 2

Hotels that have received green certification: examples of implementing environmental standards

№	Hotel name	City / Region	Year of certification	Features of environmental practices
1.	Radisson Blu Hotel Kyiv	Kyiv	2011	The first hotel in Ukraine with the Green Key certificate; Responsible Business program, energy efficiency and social responsibility
2.	Holiday Inn Kyiv	Kyiv	2024	Participation in IHG's global program "Journey to Tomorrow" with a focus on the UN SDGs
3.	IBIS City Center	Kyiv	2023	Eco-initiatives during martial law: resource conservation, security, sustainable management
4.	Maison Blanche (3 hotels)	Kyiv and region	2012	Organic products, eco-friendly cleaning, engaging guests in sustainable habits
5.	Reikartz Hotels (6 hotels)	Lviv, Kharkiv, others	2012	Energy conservation, reducing water consumption, minimizing waste, food control
6.	Glacier Premium Apartments	Bukovel	2025	Latest eco-technologies, raising awareness of customers and employees
7.	Baccara Art Hotel	Kyiv	2011	Hotel on the water, use of energy-efficient solutions, adaptation to the aquatic environment

Data is formed from [2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11]

Conclusions. Green certification represents a multi-tiered process and serves as a modern marketing tool that necessitates a strategic rethinking of the entire business model. It encompasses the integration of environmental management principles, the development of sustainable partnerships, the creation of eco-

educational programs for tourists, and the support of local communities. Successful certification not only enhances a company's reputation but also contributes to shaping a responsible operational paradigm for the tourism industry in the 21st century.

In Ukraine, Green Key certification applies to both large hotel chains and small private establishments. Its implementation fosters the development of environmentally oriented tourism and promotes a new culture within the hospitality sector – one in which consumer ethics and environmental performance form the foundation of competitive advantage.

Given Ukraine's trajectory toward European integration, environmental standards will continue to tighten. In this context, Green Key certification may become a crucial quality benchmark for the national tourism industry.

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ЗЕЛЕНА СЕРТИФІКАЦІЯ ЯК МАРКЕТИНГОВИЙ ІНСТРУМЕНТ: GREEN KEY В ТУРИЗМІ ТА ГОТЕЛЬНО-РЕСТОРАННОМУ БІЗНЕСІ

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***Анотація.** У статті проаналізовано роль зеленої сертифікації як інструменту маркетингу та просування туристичних підприємств і готельно-ресторанного сектора. Особливу увагу приділено міжнародній екологічній програмі Green Key, яка встановлює стандарти екологічної відповідальності та водночас виконує маркетингову функцію. Обґрунтовано необхідність інтеграції екостандартів у довгострокову стратегію розвитку підприємств сфери гостинності та туризму для формування позитивного іміджу, підвищення довіри споживачів і посилення конкурентоспроможності. Визначено потенціал зеленої сертифікації як стратегічного ресурсу для відновлення туристичної галузі та готельно-ресторанного бізнесу на засадах екологічної відповідальності.*

***Ключові слова:** зелена сертифікація, Green Key, готельно-ресторанний бізнес, туроперейтинг, екостандарти, маркетинговий інструмент, конкурентні переваги, екологічне управління.*