

VANESSA ZWICK & LAKSHMAN BADAMI

# The Hospitality Design Starter Framework



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## Why This Guide Exists

Most hospitality projects fail not because of poor execution, but because of unclear thinking at the beginning. In our experience working with eco-resorts, retreats, and destination projects across India, we've observed a consistent pattern: the decisions made in the first six months determine whether a project will struggle or succeed over the next twenty years.

This guide is not about trends, aesthetics, or quick wins. It's about the questions worth asking early - before land is purchased, before architects are hired, before significant capital is committed. If you're thinking about building a hospitality project, this framework will help you think more clearly about what you're actually creating and why it matters. All the best on your journey!

*Vanessa & Lakshman*

Eco-Architects & Founders, Kartoffl Studio



# A Practical Guide for Founders Thinking Clearly Before Building

Part 1: The Three Questions That Matter Most

## Question 1:

### Who Is This Actually For?

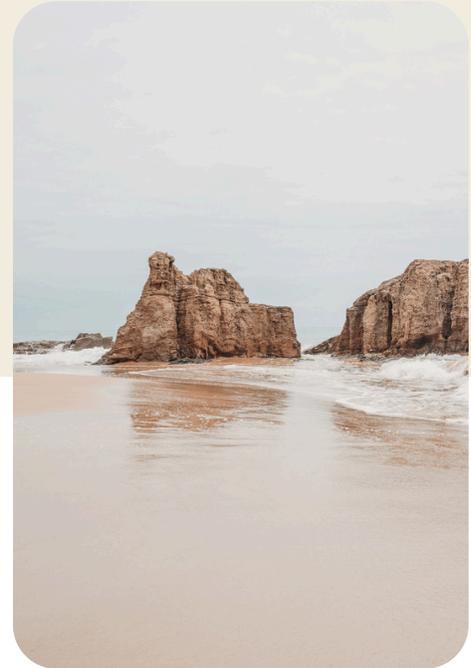
Most hospitality projects begin with a vision of the property, not the guest. This matters because a hotel designed for weekend leisure travelers operates completely differently from one serving corporate groups, wellness seekers, or extended-stay guests.

#### **What usually gets missed:**

- Assuming "quality hospitality" attracts everyone (it attracts no one specifically)
- Designing for imagined luxury travelers in markets dominated by domestic families
- Creating amenities that look impressive but serve no real guest need
- Ignoring seasonal patterns and how they affect different guest types

#### **A question worth asking early:**

If you could only serve one type of guest perfectly, who would create the most sustainable business model for your location and resources?



*In our experience:  
Properties earning 2-3x  
higher revenue per room have  
extreme clarity on their  
primary guest. They design  
everything - from room  
configuration to staff training  
- for that specific person.*

## Question 2: What Problem Does This Property Solve?

Every successful hospitality project solves a specific problem for its guest.

### **It might be:**

- Access to a unique landscape or cultural experience
- A place for focused work away from urban distractions
- Recovery and wellness in a healing environment
- Celebration space for significant life events
- Learning and transformation through immersion

### **What usually gets missed:**

- Creating another "nice place to stay" in a market with existing options
- Competing on price or amenities rather than unique value
- Assuming location alone is sufficient differentiation
- Overlooking why a guest would choose you over international alternatives

### **A question worth asking early:**

What will guests tell their friends this place gave them that they couldn't get anywhere else?

### **In our experience:**

The clearest hospitality concepts can be explained in one sentence. If you need multiple paragraphs to describe what makes your project special, the concept isn't clear yet.



## Question 3: Can You Operate This for Twenty Years?

Beautiful buildings that can't be maintained become liabilities.

Hospitality is not about the opening - it's about year five, year ten, year twenty.

### **What usually gets missed:**

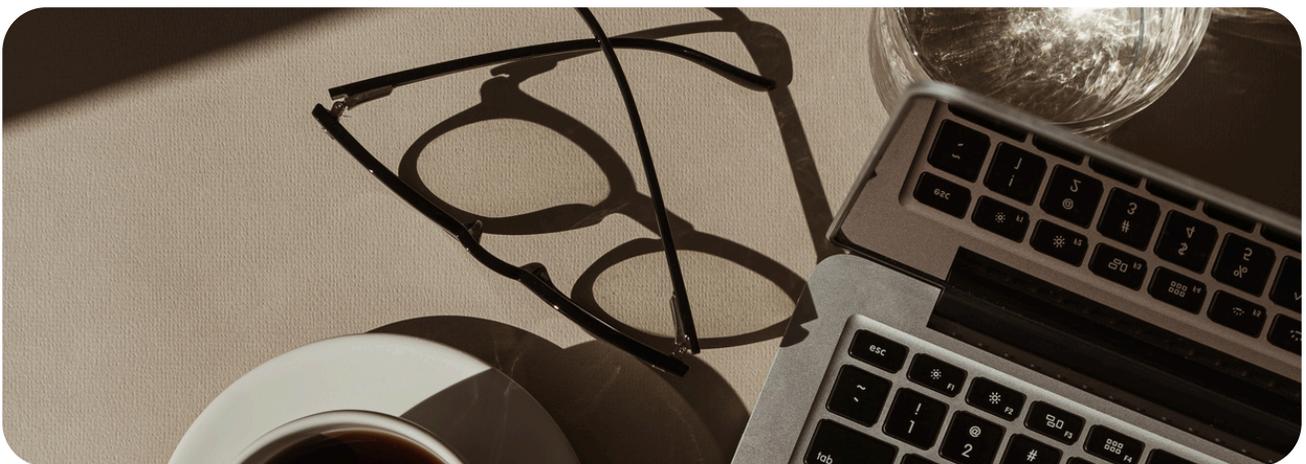
- Specifying materials or systems that require specialized maintenance unavailable locally
- Designing spaces that look impressive but create daily operational friction
- Underestimating the true cost of running a hotel in your specific location
- Ignoring staff recruitment, retention, and training realities
- Creating F&B concepts that can't sustain talented kitchen teams

### **A question worth asking early:**

If you had to operate this property yourself with local staff and resources, what would you design differently?

### **In our experience:**

Projects generating consistent returns over decades share one characteristic: operational logic was integrated into architectural decisions from the beginning, not added later.



# Part 2: Site and Context

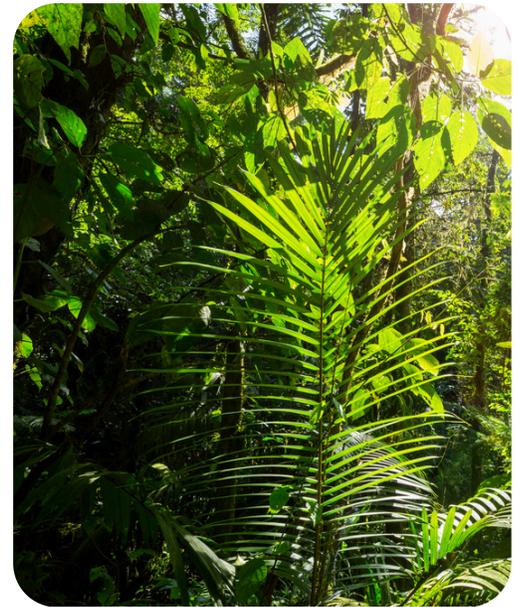
What to observe before designing anything:

**01**      **MOVEMENT OF SUN AND SHADOW**  
Where does morning light enter the site?  
Which areas receive harsh afternoon sun?  
How do shadows change seasonally?  
What provides natural shade?

**02**      **WATER BEHAVIOR**  
Where does rain flow during monsoon?  
Are there natural drainage patterns?  
What is the water table depth?  
Is there seasonal flooding or erosion?

**03**      **WIND AND AIR**  
What is the prevailing wind direction?  
Are there natural wind corridors?  
Where does air stagnate?  
How does temperature vary across the site?

**04**      **EXISTING ECOLOGY**  
What grows naturally without irrigation?  
Which trees and plants are established?  
What wildlife uses this land?  
What ecosystems would building disrupt?



## Understanding What The Land Is Telling You

Every site has inherent logic - climate patterns, topography, views, access, microclimate, existing ecology.

Good design works with this logic.

### **This matters because:**

- Climate-appropriate design reduces energy costs by 30-50% without mechanical systems
- Building with topography rather than against it cuts construction costs significantly
- Understanding sun paths, wind patterns, and seasonal water flow prevents expensive mistakes
- Local materials and building techniques often perform better than imported alternatives



# The Adjacent Context

Your property doesn't exist in isolation.

## Consider:

- How guests will arrive (airport distance, road quality, last-mile experience)
- What they'll compare you against (competition in perception, not just geography)
- Community relationships (employment, resources, waste, noise)
- Infrastructure reliability (power, water, internet, waste disposal)
- Future development that might affect your property value or guest experience

## IN OUR EXPERIENCE:

- ✓ Spending three months observing a site before designing saves three years of operational challenges.  
This is the foundation for your design.

## A QUESTION WORTH ASKING EARLY:

What could change in the surrounding area that would fundamentally alter this project's viability?

# Part 3:

## Program and Spatial Logic



**Right-Sizing Your Project** More rooms do not equal more profit.

- **What usually gets missed:**  
Building to maximize rooms rather than optimize returns
- Assuming economy of scale applies below 50-75 rooms (it often doesn't)
- Ignoring the non-linear relationship between size and operational complexity
- Underestimating how many rooms you can realistically fill year-round

### **In our experience:**

A 25-room property at 75% occupancy with strong average daily rate typically outperforms a 50-room property at 55% occupancy.

Quality of operation matters more than quantity of keys.

### **THE REAL CALCULATION:**

- ✓ Target occupancy at stabilization (year 3-5):  
Be conservative
- ✓ Realistic average daily rate for your segment and location:  
Study actual comp set performance
- ✓ Operating costs per room in your context:  
Include full staffing, maintenance, utilities
- ✓ Revenue from Food & Beverage and other sources:  
Don't over-project

If the numbers work at 20 rooms, you can always expand.

If they don't work at 50 rooms, you've built something unsustainable.

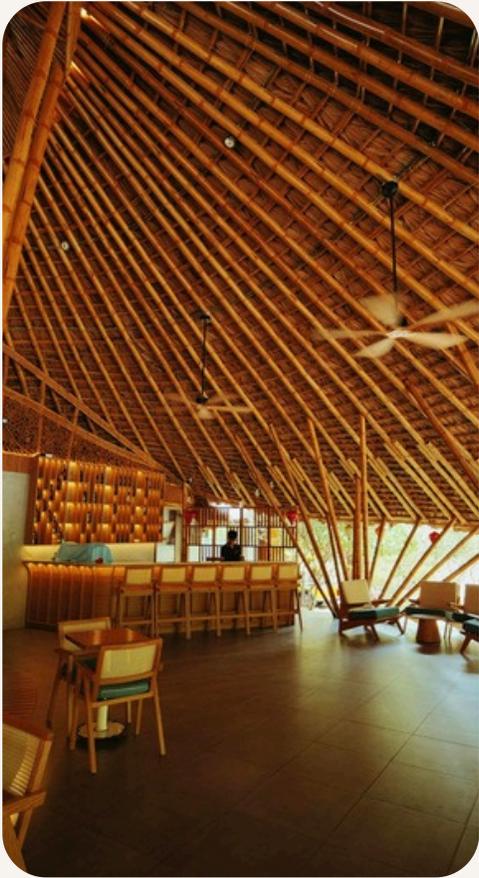
# A - Rooms: The Economic Core

Guest rooms generate the highest margin revenue in hospitality.

## **Design considerations that affect operations:**

- 1 Room configuration consistency:**
  - Identical layouts within each category enable efficient housekeeping
  - Variations create training complexity and guest confusion
  - Standardized furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FF&E) reduces procurement costs
- 2 Size and functionality:**
  - 30-35 square meters is sufficient for most categories
  - Every square meter costs money to build, clean, heat, and cool
  - Wasted space looks impressive but reduces profitability
- 3 Climate response:**
  - Cross-ventilation reduces air conditioning dependency and costs
  - Proper solar shading prevents afternoon heat gain
  - Thermal mass moderates temperature swings
  - Ceiling height affects comfort and cooling efficiency
- 4 Service access:**
  - Can housekeeping reach rooms efficiently?
  - Where do clean linens come from and soiled linens go?
  - Is there secure storage for carts and supplies on each floor?





# Other design considerations

To keep this starter framework concise, the following topics are not expanded here. Each is examined thoroughly in the full version.

**B** -

## **Food & Beverage: The Operational Challenge**

Food and beverage (F&B) can represent 30-40% of revenue - or it can lose money consistently.

**C** -

## **Back-of-House: The Invisible Foundation**

If back-of-house doesn't work, front-of-house can't deliver. Essential spaces often get undersized or are poorly located.



## **Sustainability as Performance**

Beyond Green Washing

Sustainability is not about certifications or marketing claims. It's about creating buildings that perform better, cost less to operate, and remain valuable for decades.

## **Financial Reality**

What Hospitality Projects Actually Cost  
Understanding true costs prevents fatal underestimation.

In our experience: Projects that work financially at conservative assumptions can absorb market changes. Projects that require perfect conditions to succeed usually don't.



# Where the Free Version Pauses

If you've reached this point, you've likely started to see hospitality projects a little differently.

Not as a sequence of design, budget, and operations decisions - but as a system where early clarity quietly shapes everything that follows, often long before construction begins

This free framework exists to open that lens. And this is where it intentionally pauses.

## What This Guide Was Meant to Do

The free version was designed to help you:

- ✓ Begin thinking about hospitality as a connected system
- ✓ Identify which early decisions carry long-term consequences
- ✓ Bring structure to a process that is often fragmented across consultants, advice, and opinions

It's a way to orient yourself.

It is not meant to replace detailed planning, feasibility work, or project-specific thinking.

## What the Full Framework Adds

The complete Hospitality Design Framework focuses on:

- Clear decision frameworks drawn from real hospitality projects with numbers
- Understanding when and how certain choices need to be made
- Aligning concept, land, design, finances, and operations early
- Patterns we repeatedly see in projects that struggle - and those that endure

It's structured as a reference you can return to at different stages, as questions evolve.

# If You're Planning to Go Further

## Why We Built This

In our experience, most challenges in hospitality don't come from lack of intent or ambition. They come from missing structure at the beginning.

Unresolved questions early on often resurface later as:

- Cost overruns
- Diluted concepts
- Stressful redesigns
- Compromises that could have been avoided

The full framework exists to reduce that uncertainty - by helping founders think more clearly before decisions become difficult to reverse.

If this free guide helped you clarify how to think about your project, the full framework is there to support the next stage.

**The complete Hospitality Founders Framework**  
**100+ pages | ₹12,000**

This is a tool for founders who want to move forward with confidence - and make fewer assumptions early on.

[www.kartoflstudio.com](http://www.kartoflstudio.com)



# How to work with us



## **Architecture & Master Planning**

We work closely with 2-4 clients each year, guiding projects from early concept through design development and coordination - always grounded in site, people, operations, and long-term performance.

## **Project Clarity Consultation**

Across a focused 60-minute session based on our Hospitality Design Framework (included in the session), we help you unpack your intent, read your site, identify critical early decisions, and surface risks before they become expensive mistakes.

## **Pre-Design Planning Package**

We work closely and get deep into your project. As a result you receive a concise planning document that can be used to brief architects, consultants, or internal teams - reducing friction, misalignment, and redesign later.

