Hotel cleanliness isn't optional—it's essential.

Cleanliness is a top driver of hotel selection—and a controllable factor that shapes reviews, ratings and guest satisfaction.

It's no secret that guest satisfaction is a key driver of financial success, especially in today's competitive market. When travelers have options, they reward hotels that consistently deliver the fundamentals—and cleanliness is a baseline guests expect.

A third-party survey of 598 hotel guests conducted on behalf of Ecolab in November, 2025 examines what drives hotel selection, what leads guests to return or not and which factors most often result in negative reviews or reduced guest satisfaction scores.

The findings are clear: cleanliness is one of the top factors that guests use to choose a hotel, and it is one that hotels can directly control. It also strongly influences reviews and can lower ratings for an otherwise excellent stay, shaping satisfaction, repeat intent and future bookings.

Hotel cleanliness can help attract new guests and drive repeat stays

Top issues that would prevent guests from returning:

- Room cleanliness
- Evidence of pests
- Security concerns
- Odors
- Stained linens

Key signs of cleanliness guests are looking for:

- Fresh, neutral scent
- Mold-free showers and tubs
- Clean, well-maintained lobby floors
- Clean, soft, stain-free linens

From the moment guests step into the lobby, they quickly begin forming impressions about cleanliness—shaping perceptions of hygiene, safety and how well the property is run.[1,2] And, it isn't just what they see. They evaluate cleanliness with all of their senses, including what a hotel smells like, how clean the lobby looks, and how the linens feel.

Year over year cleanliness continues to be a key indicator of guest satisfaction, with 40% of people surveyed rating cleanliness as one of their top three factors when choosing a hotel, behind only price and location.

Additionally, four out of the top five issues that would cause guests to choose a different hotel on a future trip are related to cleanliness. Notably, these factors outweigh staff interactions and service issues.

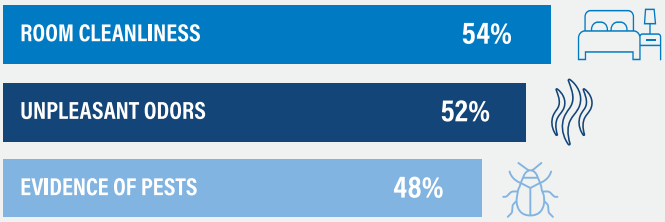
ECOLAB®

One miss can outweigh an otherwise great stay

Because first-time guests can't verify cleanliness before booking, public reviews and ratings along with past experiences play an important role in driving new business and repeat stays.

The influence of online reviews continues to grow. The share of guests who cite reviews as a top three factor in hotel selection increased by 2 percentage points, reaching 26% in 2025, up from 24% in 2024.

Top reasons guests leave negative reviews



1 IN 4 TRAVELERS CHOOSE HOTELS BASED ON REVIEWS

Cleanliness doesn't just impact one stay—it influences future bookings.

72% of guests

would give a rating of **2 stars or less to an otherwise 5-star stay** if they notice:

- **Odor**
- **Mold or mildew in shower**
- **Evidence of pests**
- **Stains on linens**

Even when every other aspect of a stay meets or exceeds expectations, the presence of a single cleanliness issue can dramatically lower a guest's rating of their stay experience. These ratings can have both a short-term and lasting effect on a hotel's success.

On average, **these top issues can drive up to a three-star reduction in ratings—even if the rest of the stay meets expectations.**

Beyond the immediate stay, lower ratings and public comments shape future bookings and can deter guests from returning—even when every other part of the experience performs well.

Make cleanliness a strategic advantage

When cleaning fundamentals fall short, guests often discount everything else. Consistent cleanliness protects guest satisfaction, supports stronger ratings and reduces the risk of negative reviews.

Visible and non-visible cues—fresh linens, clean bathrooms and a fresh-smelling property—build confidence, while responsive service and encouraging satisfied guests to share feedback help protect online reputation.

Improve outcomes by treating cleanliness as an operational discipline:

- **Set clear standards** for housekeeping
- **Prevent issues** through maintenance and pest programs
- **Equip teams** with the training and tools to resolve problems before guests arrive

In a competitive market, cleanliness is a controllable differentiator. A strong partner can help hotels move beyond products to a proven, end-to-end cleanliness program—combining the right solutions, training, and operational discipline—to consistently meet expectations, protect brand reputation, and stand out in a crowded landscape.

LEARN MORE

[1] Vos, M. C. et al. Measuring perceived cleanliness in service environments (International Journal of Hospitality Management), 2022.
[2] Vos, M. C. Spotless? Perceived Cleanliness in Service Environments (PhD Dissertation), 2019.

© 2026 Ecolab USA Inc. All rights reserved. 64215/0401/0626

ECOLAB®