

Lodging Goes Green- Planning an Environmentally Friendly Vacation

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With more than 500 million people traveling every year worldwide, tourism has a huge impact on the environment. The average hotel purchases more products in one week than 100 American families typically purchase in one year, and the lodging sector is the fourth most intensive commercial user of energy in the United States. "Green hotels," which are rapidly growing in numbers all over the world, seek to reduce the environmental impact of travelers through a variety of methods, including water and energy efficiency, solid waste reduction, and pollution prevention.

During the last several years, you may have noticed subtle environmentally friendly shifts in the hospitality industry. Easily overlooked signs include more conveniently placed recycling containers, reusable mugs instead of plastic cups, and carpets made with recycled content. More obvious changes include in-room electronic checkout and the opportunity to opt out of having your sheets and towels laundered on a daily basis.

Common Green Lodging Practices

- Installing water efficient fixtures
- Installing energy efficient fixtures
- Installing refillable soap and shampoo dispensers
- Installing LED exit signs
- Implementing aggressive recycling programs
- Substituting biodegradable and less toxic cleaning products for hazardous cleaning chemicals

In addition to choosing a low-impact lodging facility, there are many things you can do to make your vacation environmentally friendly.

The Green Hotels Association offers the following tips.

Before you leave home

- Purchase electronic airline tickets. It cuts down on paper traffic and eliminates the risk of lost tickets.
- Turn your air conditioner or heater off and your water heater to the lowest setting. This reduces the amount of energy consumed as well as your electric bill.
- If you have a waterbed, lower its temperature setting by at least 10 degrees.

At your hotel

- Participate in the hotel's linen program. If your hotel does not have one, let the management know that it is not necessary for them to change your sheets and towels every day.
- Turn off the air conditioner/heat, lights, television, and radio and close the drapes when you leave the room.
- Deposit your recyclables in the appropriate bins.
- If you like a nightlight, pack one instead leaving the bathroom light and/or fan on all night.
- Turn off exercise equipment, sauna, and/or whirlpool before leaving the gym facility.
- Check out via the electronic program, if available, on the television. You can view your bill, approve it, and help reduce paper work and time.

Out on the town

- Consider taking walking tours.
- Use public transportation.
- If you are driving, carpool.
- Do not use disposable cameras. They are wasteful and expensive; consider buying a regular or digital camera.
- Reduce film packaging waste by purchasing rolls with 36 shots as opposed to 24, or buy in bulk.

The next time you vacation, take advantage of the many easy opportunities available to you to protect the environment. Remember that every little bit helps. For example, recycling just one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a television set for three hours. And if you participate in a hotel's linen program, you can save 13.5 gallons of freshwater daily. With only a little bit of planning, you can make your vacation a low-impact one. To learn more about Green Lodging, contact Maia Kaiser at 410-306-2274.