

# Corporations Seeing Green in Hotel Choices

*Environmentally friendly hotel policies are gaining ground worldwide.*



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As the debate on global warming continues to heat up, corporations and their travelers are increasingly concerned about the impact their travel choices have on the environment. Travel managers who are looking into ways to reduce their company's carbon footprint may therefore consider eco-friendly criteria when selecting hotels for their travel program.

The idea for environmentally friendly hotel operations is not new. Many hotel chains have instituted "green" practices, and organizations such as the U.S.-based Green Hotels Associations (GHA) has been "encouraging, promoting and supporting ecological consciousness in the hotel industry" for more than a decade. At the basis are practical guidelines and ideas for **saving energy, environmentally friendly products, and tools** such as cards asking guests to consider using their linen more than once.

**Specific initiatives** carried out by hotel chains include the following:

- Accor Hotels aims to control energy use, limit water consumption, manage waste and preserve biodiversity in nearly 60 countries around the world. Its Hotel Environment Charter provides concrete guidelines to support the company's green initiatives worldwide, which were recently showcased on Accor's Earth Guest Day.
- Carlson Hotels Worldwide is committed to conserving natural resources in daily operations, through initiatives such as linen and towel re-use, energy management, recycling and waste management. In Europe, the group adheres to the industry-leading environmental program developed by its partner, Rezidor SAS Hospitality, which sets ambitious targets for energy, water and waste reduction. Carlson Hotels Worldwide is also a founding member of the International Tourism Partnership,

a U.K.-based organization that fosters global corporate social responsibility with a special focus on green issues.

- Intercontinental, Crowne Plaza and Holiday Inn, in partnership with Project Planet, have the Conserving for Tomorrow linen and towel reuse program with 68 percent to 72 percent of multi-night guests participating. Project Planet estimates that a 100-room property can save 6,000 gallons of water and more than US\$20,000 per year in reduced water, energy, labor, detergent and laundry costs by not replacing bath towels and sheets daily.
- Marriott International aims to ensure that every community in which the chain operates benefits from its presence. Energy conservation has reduced greenhouse emissions by 70,000 tons per year and saved Marriott millions annually.
- The Saunders Hotel Group has the Saunders Hotel Initiatives to Nurture the Environment (SHINE) program. SHINE is committed to preserving the past and protecting the future by implementing eco-friendly practices and products. Through SHINE, its hotels have saved 225,000 kilowatts of electricity and 1.5 million gallons of water annually.

In addition, numerous **certification programs** have sprung up, initiated by industry groups, associations and governments around the world. Among the best known are Energy Star, a joint energy conservation program run by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy, the Australia-based Green Globe program for sustainable travel and tourism, and the E.U. EcoLabel for environmentally friendly tourist accommodation services.

Given the wide variety of green programs and practices, not all of which are audited, corporations interested in **doing business with hotels supporting environmentally safe practices** should inquire about a hotel or hotel chains' policies during the Request for Proposal process. Their final decision can be assisted by having answers to the following questions:

- Do your properties have a green policy? If so, what does it cover?
- Have your properties reduced their overall energy consumption year over year?
- Have goals been set to reduce your properties impact on the environment?
- What procedures are in place to reduce water and energy consumption?
- Do your properties have:
  - A smoke-free policy?
  - Low-flow showerheads and toilets, and sink aerators?
  - Paper products made of 50 percent recycled content?
  - Fluorescent light bulbs in guestrooms, lobbies and hallways?
  - Sensors or timers for areas which are infrequently used?



- Refillable hair and skin care dispensers?
- Recycling bins in guestrooms, public areas, kitchen and offices?
- A process to turn off lights and turn down heating/air conditioning when rooms are unoccupied?
- Window film to lower heating or cooling loads and reduce glare in guestrooms?
- Both water- and energy-conserving washing machines?
- Re-usable items such as cloth napkins, glass cups and ceramic dishes with food and beverage service?
- A certified green restaurant, buying organic, locally grown food?
- A program to donate leftover guest amenities, old furniture and appliances to charity?

In addition to standard green practices, some hotels have implemented more sophisticated procedures such as:

- Installing cardkey systems to automatically shut off lights and heating or cooling systems when a guest leaves the room.
- Implementing a solid waste reduction program to reduce waste hauling fees.
- Using heat generated from the air conditioning system to provide hot water for hotel and guest use.
- Replacing water-cooled ice machines with air-cooled equipment.
- Composting spoiled and leftover foods.
- Replacing carpets with recycled wood flooring to decrease cleaning costs and time.

For their efforts, hotels with a green program are realizing cost savings. Clients and their travelers, however, should not expect this to translate into lower rates. A green program takes time to put in place and has implementation costs associated with it.

While acceptance of a property's environmental approach will not be the only factor for selecting a particular hotel or hotels for a travel program, it may play a decisive role when non-green hotels offer a similar rate. Given the choice, travel managers and their travelers may move the eco-friendly hotel to the top of the list. ■