



The state of greening hotels

September 26, 2011 - Green Buildings

Going on vacation imbues many travelers with the feeling of escaping reality bringing with it amnesia about all things wrong with the world, including climate change. While these travelers may be unconcerned with linen reuse programs or green certifications, their travel pleasures are contingent upon the work of the hospitality industry to manifest sustainability programs which result in the preservation of the natural resources their trips depend on. On the flip side, a large group of travelers are eco-conscious, savvy and selective about their spending. These travelers make sustainable selections such as opting into linen reuse programs and staying at green certified hotels. This market sector demands authentic sustainability features and is willing to pay. On either side of the spectrum the call to action is clear; the hospitality industry has reasons to step it up with sustainable practices.

Market research shows that hotels featuring green amenities are attracting more guests and accruing operational cost savings (Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, August 2011 "Hotel Guests' Preferences for Green Guest Room Attributes," by Michelle Millar and Seyhmus Baloglu). The question is how to bring green hotel certifications into the decision making process of travelers?

Eco-conscious consumers read labels. When they are at home they buy certified organic foods, select products made and packaged with environmentally safe and friendly materials, practice conservation of energy and water, and minimize waste and maximize recycling to name just a few regular practices. When traveling, many of these choices are at the mercy of the hotel, yet travelers' criteria for selecting a hotel is often rooted in price and location, two critical components of a successful trip. Therefore, green certification often falls off of the list, even for eco-conscious travelers.

Whose responsibility is it? Should consumers be managing up and demanding greener practices at hotels? Should hotels create efficiency programs and provide behind the scenes solutions? Should government mandate these changes? Should corporations require that lodging for business travel be at green certified hotels? All of the above are in the works. More hotels are ramping up their sustainability efforts and pursuing green certifications; 31 hotels achieved LEED certification and 877 were registered as of 2009 (USGBC). Travelers have an opportunity to decrease their environmental footprint by adding green certified hotels to their hotel selection criteria. Cities like N.Y. are requiring all commercial properties, including hotels, above 50,000 s/f to benchmark and report their energy consumption as well as to conduct audits and make energy efficiency improvements. While a global approach to greening hotels is underway, a stronger commitment by all parties will push individuals, corporations, governments and hotels to take the green hotel movement to the next level.

Healthy Buildings works with hotels to create sustainability programs and achieve green certifications. For a free consultation to determine which program is best for your hotel, email

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