

WHAT BUSINESS TRAVELERS SHOULD EXPECT AT GREEN HOTELS



More and more business travelers consider green hotels and sustainable conferences as a good option to behave in an environmentally friendly way. Both hotels where the conferences are held and those who arrange the meetings respond to the trend by organizing green events. Also, hotels are applying more sustainable rules into their day-to-day operations.

Among business travelers today more than one in eight seek business hotels that have addressed some elements of sustainability, according to the most recent survey from the National Business Travel Association, Alexandria, VA.

The good news behind green business travel is that many advocates of sustainability - tourism offices, hoteliers, event venues, caterers, transportation companies, exhibitors, marketers and others involved with providing event services - have been creating environmentally-friendly resources for hotels and conferences for quite some time.

They think of themselves as "students of sustainability," as many were described at the 2010 Green Meetings Industry Council (GMIC) annual conference in Denver. And they continue to explore sustainable practices in business travel.

Even better news is that many sustainable ideas have been implemented that are worthy of the approval that many business travelers have given to green hotels and the green sustainable conferences they attend.

Green Hotel Initiatives for Business Travelers

Basics such as towel and linen reuse programs are now practically standard at business hotels, along with recycle baskets and the opt-in or opt-out options for delivery of daily newspapers.

So what can business travelers expect next? "Energy conservation measures that are handled either by staff or through automation," says Julie Klein, director of environmental affairs for RockResorts, Vail, CO. Examples include thermostat setbacks, minimal arrival lighting, sensors and timers to turn off or set back heating, cooling and lighting systems, among others.

Vail Resorts - which includes RockResorts - has embraced sustainability initiatives at all of its properties. They use low-flow water systems, all natural bath amenities, room keys made of environmentally-friendly materials, and non-toxic cleaning products.

Corporate hotel chains are also getting on board to support green business travel. For example, Starwood Resorts recently announced that it will roll out sustainability guidelines in 2011 for its hotels in North America. Starwood is defining some best practices for meetings and events - from sustainable menu choices and bottled water alternatives to energy-efficient digital signage and potted plants in place of fresh-cut flowers.

Sustainable Conference Initiatives for Business Travelers

So, after settling into a green hotel, what should business travelers expect when attending green

conferences? As is the case with accommodations, those involved in business events behind the scenes are addressing many sustainability issues.

Subtle changes can make a big impact:

1. Source food locally (30% is a good target).
2. Discourage use of bottled water.
3. Donate leftovers to a food bank.
4. Compost food waste.
5. Recycle general waste.
6. Print materials on recycled paper.
7. Choose eco-friendly client gifts.
- 8 Design signage for reuse.
9. Use energy-efficient audio/visual equipment.
10. Rely on public transportation and/or fuel efficient shuttles.

Oracle has been recognized for its leadership in adopting sustainable practices for event marketing activities at its annual conference, Oracle OpenWorld Conference. In 2009, Oracle's approach saved more than \$800,000 through reduction and reuse of materials.

Who's Influencing Sustainability?

More than three-quarters of those who plan meetings in Europe, Asia and the Middle East consider issues of corporate social responsibility in their programs. And nearly two-thirds of planners in the U.S. and Canada have the same objective. This, according to "FutureWatch 2010" from Meeting Professionals International, Dallas.

Fortune 500 companies have also begun to back the effort, according to GMIC.

While many steps have been taken to reduce the overall resources expended and the industry chooses more renewable options for business travel, the discussion about sustainable meetings is a conversation that will continue to evolve.

Perhaps the next opportunity may be with convention centers where large congresses and exhibitions are held. Many U.S. event organizers at the GMIC conference expressed that these venues must become much more flexible when it comes to recycling and catering options. These have already been addressed by many of their European counterparts.

To be sure, not all sustainability advocates are on board with business travel. Detractors openly criticize the nature of business meetings, claiming that such events go against the idea of sustainability with air travel as their most visible target.

Perhaps that judgment belongs to those who actually organize and/or attend meetings to achieve their business priorities and operating goals.

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