

CHECKLIST FOR GREEN HOTELS AND SUSTAINABLE MEETINGS



Business travelers and meeting professionals who support green hotels and sustainable meetings expect venues to reduce their environmental footprint in ways that do not compromise the guest experience.

Programs such as linen and towel reuse, recycling bins in guest rooms and function spaces, and energy and water conservation initiatives are a good start. But hoteliers today know they should go beyond these sustainable basics to attract business events moving forward. **42% of senior meeting planners say they are now fully committed to corporate social responsibility for their events (i.e., green meetings)**, according to FutureWatch 2011, sponsored by the MPI Foundation and IMEX.

"If a client values environmental responsibility and has the goal of making their meetings or events environmentally responsible, the planner needs to go beyond the 'check box' and ask questions about the property's commitment, about the certifications, about how efficient the buildings are, and ask for examples of the property's practices," advises Chris Brophy, vice president of Energy and Environmental Services for MGM Resorts International, Las Vegas.

CityCenter - one of the world's largest green developments - was designed with sustainability in mind and this should catch the attention of those interested in sustainable travel and green meetings. CityCenter developed by MGM Resorts International. Opened in December 2009, it includes Aria Resort & Casino, Vdara Hotel & Spa, Mandarin Oriental, Crystals (a retail and entertainment complex) and private residences.

The buildings themselves are an important part of the choice to be "more sustainable" within a guest's stay. **Just by choosing Aria, for example, the combination of building systems and operational practices reduces the environmental impacts of a meeting by more than 38% as compared to a typical Las Vegas resort**, according to Brophy.

Specific to business events and conventions, CityCenter diverts more than 55% of its waste from landfills through recycling programs each year. That's equal to almost 17 fully loaded 747 aircraft. For green meetings, CityCenter offers enhanced recycling, organic and sustainable food options, and sustainable meeting setup-up practices (i.e., pre-set water on request only).

To be sure, while not all hotels have the opportunity to incorporate sustainability from planning blueprints, many are certainly aware that meeting professionals and business travelers will be paying attention to the following elements:

Sustainable Energy Design

We all know that hotels and resorts require energy to operate the facilities, but there are many ways that hoteliers can increase energy efficiency. Being a new resort, CityCenter was able to achieve a 30% increase in efficiency vs. similar buildings by generating its own electricity on site, as well as the following energy initiatives which many hotels can begin to adopt:

- * Use of low-wattage lighting in guest rooms, public spacing and garages.
- * Use of window glazing, building shades and light-colored rooftops.

- * Use of computerized control systems to monitor and maximize energy conservation.

Water Conservation

In many areas, water is a precious resource, and Las Vegas is definitely one of those places. As a new development, CityCenter was able to benefit from advanced plumbing design and low-flow technologies. These elements are what planners and business travelers keep in mind when choosing sustainable hotels:

- * Use of low-flow showerheads, faucets and toilets that do not compromise performance (saves 30%).
- * Use of local and drought-tolerant landscaping for their heat and low-water tolerance.
- * Use of moisture control sensors and technologies to irrigate only as needed (saves 60%).

Hotel Ventilation

We all know that a properly ventilated building will result in better air quality and energy savings. But several other important elements impact that ventilation that may not be so obvious. CityCenter addressed its indoor air quality issues before construction. What should planners and travelers learn about? Consider the following:

- * Use of paints, sealants, adhesives, carpet and composite wood that do not contain toxic substances.
- * Use of proper room sealants to prevent tobacco smoke between units ("smoke-free" is another option).
- * Use of air flow from the floor to the ceiling to result in an odor-free environment (Aria's casino).
- * Use of cleaning products that meet strict health and environmental standards.

Recycling the Building

Perhaps it may surprise some to know that CityCenter used more than 85% of the materials from the previous hotel at the site, eliminating the need to put many old materials into local landfills and reducing the need to manufacture new materials. That's an enviable idea.

Use of Recycled Materials

This is something that many hotels can easily consider when building new or undergoing refurbishments. When selecting materials for CityCenter, designers chose products manufactured with recycled content, and they also chose local and regional products to reduce the footprint required during transport and deliver.

Sustainable Transportation

Many business travelers and meeting professionals consider issues related to transportation when they travel. The Las Vegas Strip, for example, is very close to the airport and that's a good message. But the idea of the mega hotels of Vegas also means that there's little need to use automobiles.

CityCenter is a larger campus, but most services and amenities are easily accessed by walking and staying on property. Still, CityCenter considers the transportation of guests with bicycle storage, buses and the monorail system. But taken one step further, employees and others who drive hybrid and electric cars are given access to preferred parking to encourage the use of alternative-fuel and low-emission vehicles.

Commitment to Sustainability

When it comes to sustainability, CityCenter had the advantage of timing on its side. They were able to create an environment that considers nearly every area of conservation while creating a resort destination that's appealing to the demands needed for green meetings and sustainable travel. And that's an important requirement for hotels of the future. As a new hotel, Aria has this advantage over others that were built in an earlier era. But don't count them out. All hoteliers know what it will take

to retrofit and address their sustainability goals.

Sustainability Certifications

Green Key Global Eco-Hospitality Certification is now the largest international hospitality certification program. And The US Green Building Council (USGBC) has established the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), an internationally recognized certification system for green buildings. The point for meeting planners and business travelers is that they watch for these and other seals of approval.

Designations will provide insight as to what extent venues achieve standards set to minimize the footprint of their programs. USGBC has awarded six distinct LEED Gold certifications to ARIA Resort & Casino's hotel tower, convention center and showroom; as well as Vdara Hotel & Spa, Mandarin Oriental, Crystals, and Veer Towers. ARIA and Vdara have also received 5 out of 5 Green Keys for the environmental friendliness of their operations and buildings.

Additional Resources

In April 2011 the Hotel Association of Canada and MPI Foundation Canada launched the Green Key Meetings Program, an assessment tool for hotels and resort properties that provides a database for event professionals seeking to determine a hotel's commitment to sustainability efforts. The hotel's operations are ranked from one to five based on a thorough evaluation of efforts; the ranking is listed on greenkeymeetings.com.

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