

Is Tourism Good for the Environment?

Although it is no longer rare to find on a hotel bed a sign asking the guest to reuse his/her towel or to accept having sheets changed once every three days rather than once a day, many people still wonder if tourism is an environmentally friendly industry. Due to past mistakes the public is often cynical about tourism and it is not unusual to hear people wondering out loud if the desire to change sheets once every three days is more about saving the hotel money than about saving the environment. There is no doubt that tourism, at least in the past, has not always been environmentally friendly.



There are many reasons why we in the tourism industry must face numerous challenges when it comes to proper stewardship of the earth. Travel is hard, and people on vacation or a business trip want to be pampered. Many visitors believe that part of the fun of traveling is leaving cares and concerns behind and enjoying those little extras luxuries that are not part of most people's everyday lives. Thus, when on vacation we tend to use more towels than necessary, and are not always as conscious of our ecological responsibilities as we should be.

Furthermore, most travelers never consider that even though they are not paying for the water in a hotel, on a macro level its usage has a major environmental impact. Restaurants, hotels, and attractions often keep their air conditioning at sweater weather conditions. Attractions and transportation centers often stay lit up all night long, adding to the earth's light and energy pollution. The problem with this attitude is that when we move from the individual to millions of individuals, then the collective damage becomes severe.

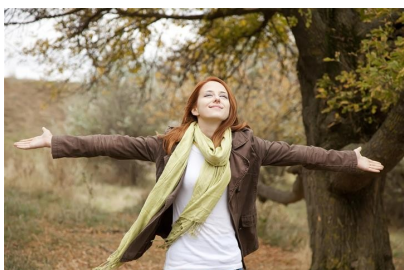
Another problem in keeping the world green is the over use of concrete and the lack of plants and beautification projects. Too many urban areas have become fields of concrete held together by rivers of asphalt. These areas are not only visually unappealing, but tend to hold heat in causing higher air conditioning usage. Plants are nature's way of turning carbon monoxide into oxygen and are the planet's living lungs. Cities that create green spaces not only add beauty to their visitors and citizens' lives but also help to replenish our oxygen supply and green spaces are an easy and inexpensive way to lower crime rates.



Tourism and travel then are faced with the issue of balancing the needs of the environment with the

needs of its customer base. If travel becomes too hard, then it may lose its enchantment and glamour; if on the other hand it does not respect the Earth then there may be no place to which to travel! Here are some of the ways that we can turn travel and tourism from a polluter and energy waster to a green commodity that is elegant, gracious and enchanting.

- **Promote hotel sensible laundry policies.** For example do not only employ such tried and true methods of washing sheets every three days rather than every day, but also consider the use of new technologies such as light bulbs that save on light/heat pollutions.
- **Develop a green tourism measurement scale for your community.** Because most communities have no overall environmental plan, few locales know how well they are doing in creating green tourism. Develop an overall city plan that includes such things as: traffic control, transportation issues, water usage, pollutants emitted into the atmosphere and natural water resources, animal protection, garbage disposal, paper usage. Make sure to tailor your measurement scale to the needs and challenges of your community or location, and weight those factors most heavily that have the greatest impact on your community or location. Take the time to review your tourism area. Is it easy or difficult to throw away rubbish? Is protection provided for sensitive foliage? Are people made aware of what is harmful and what is permitted? Remember that in a multi-national, multilingual world signage must be understandable not only by those who speak the native language but also by foreign guests. Also remember to inform while guarding against noise and sign pollution.
- **Remind people that good security begins with a sense of environmental pride.** Many tourism security professionals emphasize that good security starts with beautification projects and good environmental control. For example, New York City learned that by cleaning up the trash, fixing broken windows, and getting rid of graffiti that it was able to lower its crime rate considerably. In a like measure the more any of us care for our environment, the more pride we have in it and the lower the chance of crime.



- **Think sensibly.** Sometimes the least innovative is the most ecologically friendly. For example, paper towels in wash rooms come from renewable resource, tree farms, but electricity is not only expensive to produce but also its production is environmentally unfriendly. Replace electric hand drying machines that not only are ecologically unfriendly but also tend to spread germs with paper towels made from tree farms.
- **Restaurants can exemplify good environmentalism.** Restaurants can be careful to use soaps that pollute less and serve water only upon request. There are a numerous washing devices on the market that use less water and less power than hand dishwashing. In fact, washing by hand is often less ecologically friendly, uses more pollutants and requires more hot water than does an eco-friendly dishwasher.
- **Be eco-friendly at your car rental places.** Attractions and car rental companies should switch to electric cars as soon as possible and instead of running buses for local transport, use mini-vans, golf carts or other vehicles that tend to use minimum of fossil fuels.

- **Turn your environmentalism into a form of marketing.** All too often people in the travel and tourism industries forget that a clean and healthy environment does not take away from the bottom line it adds to it. Do not define “green” in its most narrow sense of the word, but rather in its broadest sense. Few people will spend a lot of money to eat over a garbage dump, but many people are more than willing to spend top dollar to eat in a charming setting, be that setting a table overlooking an ocean, a crystal clear lake, a beautiful garden, or a forest.

By promoting green and by finding innovative ways to protect the environment, tourism is assuring that it will continue to offer products that are pleasant to the eye, and good for generations that are yet to be born. The wise travel and tourism marketer promotes the ecological health of his/her area in all written, oral and visual marketing efforts.

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