

EarthTalk: Greener travel and lodging options

Written by Earth Talk From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine
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Dear EarthTalk: I'm a travel agent and our firm has several clients wanting to go with green vendors, including for travel (airline or rental car) and lodging. Our company is supportive so would like to know which airlines, hotels and car rental agencies are going affordably green? -- Carol Biggar, via e-mail

Just like every other industry, going green has become a mantra among airlines, car rental companies and even hotel chains. The fuel crunch of a few years ago forced all the airlines into belt-tightening mode and the results—lower fuel consumption and fewer emissions—are good news for the environment.

Boeing, one of the world's leading aircraft makers, is doing its part: Its new 787 is some 20 percent more fuel efficient than other big passenger planes. Beyond saving fuel—which also reduces emissions—airlines are instituting in-flight recycling initiatives, incorporating carbon-neutral biofuels, and going paperless to reduce waste. Continental, British Airways, Singapore Air, American Airlines, JetBlue, Southwest and Virgin are among the leaders in the industry-wide effort to go green, but most airlines have made huge strides in recent years to lower their carbon footprints overall.

With regard to lodging, going green isn't just for youth hostels and campgrounds anymore. In a recent survey, upwards of two-thirds of U.S. hotels said they had energy-efficient lights and had implemented towel- and linen-reuse programs—up from just over half five years ago. According to Budget Travel magazine, Accor/Motel6, Intercontinental, Marriott, Starwood, Hilton, Hyatt, Best Western and Wyndham/Super8 have all made huge strides in energy and water conservation, recycling and green design over the last few years. Beyond the chains, many independent hotels have taken up the green baton; you'll likely find one or more at your destination via the website of the Green Hotels Association.

As for rental car companies, just about all of them offer large selections of fuel efficient cars these days, if for no other reason than to meet the demands of both business and vacationing customers not interested in spending lots of money on gas. Hertz, Avis, Budget and Enterprise each have large fleets of hybrid and/or flex-fuel (ethanol) cars for rent at hundreds of airport and

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in-town locations around the U.S. Advantage Rent-a-Car has pledged to turn 100 percent of its rental fleet “green” by 2010. For now, renting a hybrid still typically costs \$5-15 more per day than an equivalent conventional car, but as rental car companies bring more of the vehicles online, prices should start to reach parity. And if you’re driving a long way in the car, you may just make up the difference in fuel savings. Travelers to the Bay Area should keep in mind that San Francisco International Airport offers a \$15 credit for renting a hybrid from any of the rental car companies operating there.

Traveling by any means other than foot, bicycle or paddle always takes some toll on the environment, but those who watch their carbon footprints—and stay abreast of which vendors offer the greenest courses of action—can keep their impacts to a minimum. Stay tuned to websites like Go Green Travel Green for the latest info on what airlines, hotels, car rental companies and other travel-related businesses are doing to green up their industry.

CONTACTS: Budget Travel magazine, www.budgettravel.com; Green Hotels Association, www.greenhotels.com; Go Green Travel Green, www.gogreentravelgreen.com.

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