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Green Tips for the Savvy Traveler

by Ewald Biemans

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As the importance of sustainable tourism continues to grow, environmentally sensitive travelers should be aware of the difference between authentically green resorts and “greenwashed” resorts and hotels that position themselves as environmentally friendly but only have minimal green practices in place.

The following 11 tips and considerations will help savvy travelers identify the greenest resorts:

Guest Participation

Are guests informed of and invited to be involved in resortwide environmental activities? Are guests given the opportunity and encouraged to diminish their environmental footprint by purchasing carbon credits? Does the resort have strong traditional programs that focus on reducing, reusing and recycling?

Guest participation in environmental activities can include activities such as recycled crafts contests, islandwide clean ups, educational seminars, and “back of the house” tours to meet the “green team” and learn about the technology and best practices involved in the resort’s environmental policy.

Staff Training

Does the hotel or resort have a strong company culture where all associates are involved in implementing green practices? Do employees play an important role in implementing sustainable and environmentally friendly practices from their first day on the job?

Does the resort have a dedicated “green team”? Does the team work with the maintenance department in order to take part in quality control? Are consumption and system checks documented? How does the team support the company culture throughout the resort?



The Bucuti Beach Resort in Aruba is certified Green Globe 21 for the eighth consecutive year and ISO 14001 for the fifth consecutive year.

Renewable Resources

Does the resort harness solar, hydro and/or wind power? Depending on where travelers are vacationing, various natural resources can be used.

Stewardship

How does the hotel or resort promote environmental preservation within its community? Does it set the example by proactively and publically educating the community?

Community education can take the form of sharing of best practices or speaking about environmental practices at schools and local organizations, including local and international service clubs, associations and government entities, as well as participation in community events.

Native Environment

Does the resort help promote and protect local culture, fauna and flora? Does the resort provide signage to identify the indigenous plants around the resort? Does the resort sponsor and actively pursue preservation of historical and cultural architecture, national parks and traditions?

Some resorts support native animal protection programs or are located within land preserves. For example, my Bucuti Beach Resort in Aruba supports the Donkey Sanctuary; Turtugaruba, which supports the protection of giant sea turtle nesting sites; and Animal Rights Aruba.

Does the resort offer local cuisine in its restaurants? Does it promote local musicians in the bar? Is the local language introduced on its Web site and property? Is the gift shop stocked with local products and crafts from local artisans?

Eco-Recognition

Has the resort achieved internationally recognized certification for its policies and standards in environmental protection such as ISO 14001 or Green Globe 21? Has the resort received green awards from hotel associations and leading travel publications for its exemplary practices?

Waste Reduction

Does the hotel track and measure the use of water, electricity and other resources? Are bulk dispensers used throughout the resort to reduce waste? Does the resort use reusable glassware and utensils as opposed to throwaway plastic materials? Are low-flow toilets, faucets and showers in place? Does the resort exclusively use natural cleaning and biodegradable products?

Transportation

Does the resort support local transportation systems that use alternative fuel sources like bio fuels or electrical-powered vehicles to mitigate emissions? Does the resort support use of public transportation and encourage employees to carpool?

Construction

Is the hotel structure designed to allow for breezy, open-air areas to reduce energy consumption by using natural lighting and not running air conditioners? Are the rooms designed to be energy efficient? Does the facility use natural wood from a sustainable farm and local building materials and labor?

Safety and Quality

Are quality control systems such as HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) in place for food safety? For example, the Bucuti Resort in Aruba uses disinfection systems for fluids and surfaces that are based on ultraviolet light technology; all water intake travels through this sophisticated pipe system. These advanced systems complement the daily routine of the

maintenance department in monitoring and flushing water lines.

Future Green Technology

Is the resort at the forefront of green advances and following industry trends like using the latest energy-saving equipment to mitigate consumption? Are there in-room sensors (for air conditioners, power sources, etc.) to determine if electricity can be conserved in an empty room?

Many resorts brand themselves as “eco-friendly,” but savvy travelers who follow these tips can recognize greenwashed resorts from those truly dedicated to protecting the environment.

Ewald Biemans

Ewald Biemans is the owner of Bucuti Beach Resort in Aruba. Biemans has been an environmental advocate for more than 30 years and has lead Bucuti to become a model resort in sustainable tourism throughout the Caribbean and the world. Biemans' early adoption and promotion of environmental protection within the Bucuti Beach Resort and throughout the community and region has earned recognition with awards from Green Globe, the Caribbean Hotel Association, the Aruban Ministry, American Express, ISLANDS Magazine, National Geographic and the International Hotel and Restaurant Association. For more information on what Bucuti Beach Resort does to protect the environment, visit www.bucuti.com/en/about_us/environment.php.