

"USA TODAY's Green Tech series explores how green-tech innovations are changing everything from vacations to war-making

When you travel these days, you're doing so in a more environmentally friendly fashion than you did a decade ago — and you probably can't even tell.

Airlines are flying planes that have more fuel-efficient engines and are lighter in weight to save on costly jet fuel. Architects are designing hotels to be more efficient in their use of energy and water, and to reduce waste. Rental car agencies are adding more hybrid and electric cars to their fleets.

Some steps have been forced on the industry by the threat of government action, sheer economics or customer demands. But some companies say it's just good business.

Many associations, for instance, refuse to meet in hotels that don't meet environmentally friendly standards.

"We actually have customers who are asking, 'What's the carbon footprint of our meeting?'" says Paul Snyder, vice president of corporate responsibility for IHG, parent company of InterContinental Hotels, Holiday Inn and others.

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In a TripAdvisor survey of 700 U.S. travelers last year, 57% said they often make eco-friendly travel decisions.

But Adam Weissenberg, vice chairman and leader of Deloitte's U.S. Travel, Hospitality and Leisure practice, says price still drives most travel decisions.

"There's not a lot of desire yet for people to pay extra for this in general," he says. "I think there's more of a, 'This is the right thing to do.'"

Among the ways the travel industry is responding to the demand to go green:

HOTELS

Hotels have progressed far beyond giving guests the option of not having their towels and linens changed every day.

They're building green hotels or retrofitting old properties to be more sustainable. In 2008, there were 18 hotels with LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, certification awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council, an industry non-profit. Last year, there were 198 LEED-certified properties.

Green buildings use, on average, 26% less energy, emit 33% less carbon dioxide, use 30% less water, and produce 50% to 75% less solid waste, according to the building council.

Hotels also are adopting motion sensors, key cards that control lights, fluorescent bulbs and ceiling fans aimed at saving energy. To save water, they're installing low-flow shower heads and low-flow toilets. They're recycling more and replacing individual shampoo bottles with large dispensers.

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Budget and luxury hotels are instituting company-wide programs to become more sustainable.

More than 2,250 of IHG's hotels participate in the company's "Green Engage" program, an online tool that helps the properties measure and report their energy, water and waste. They can see how they stack up against each other and take actions to be more green. The program has helped hotels save 10% to 25% on energy costs, IHG says.

Starwood's Element Hotels, meanwhile, is seeking LEED certification, the group says. The properties use eco-friendly materials wherever possible, such as carpets with 100% recycled content and framed art mounted on a base made from recycled tires. Bath amenities are in dispensers. Glassware and metal flatware are used instead of paper cups and plastic utensils. Fitness centers have stationary bikes with pedal-powered generators to charge tablets or smartphones. [lire la suite](#)

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