

Green Hotel Certification Programs Snowball, Sparks Confusion

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Pineapple Hospitality and EcoGreenHotel examine hotel certification programs, and explore how changes in the market will impact your business.

The trend toward eco-conscious travel has brought with it a growing number of green hotel certification programs in the hospitality industry. But the sheer volume of different programs and options has led to uncertainty among travelers, meeting planners - and even the hotel operators themselves. After all, does anyone really know the differences between Green Key, Green Globe, Green Leaf and Green Seal?

Each program has its benefits and drawbacks, and some offer more legitimate measures of eco-consciousness than others. So what does it mean to be associated with a particular program? Which one best fits your hotel's sustainability strategy? We'll answer those all-important questions in just a moment.

But first, let's tend to the issue that trumps all the others: Does certification really matter?

Why Certify?

According to the World Tourism Organization, ecotourism is the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, growing at a rate of 5% worldwide and representing over 11% of all consumer spending. And the non-profit International Ecotourism Society recently stated 'more than two-thirds of U.S. and Australian travelers, and 90% of British tourists, consider active protection of the environment and support of local communities to be part of a hotel's responsibility.'

Furthermore, the J.D. Power and Associates' 2009 North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study, which surveyed over 66,000 guests who stayed in North American hotels between May of 2008 and June of 2009, found that guests' awareness of their hotel's green programs increased significantly in 2009. Sixty-six percent of guests said they were aware of their hotel's conservation efforts, up from 57 percent the previous year.

And in a nod to the wishes of its environmentally concerned membership, AAA has added an "eco" icon to its 2010 Tour Books for hotels, motels, and other lodging facilities. The AAA Eco Program identifies - and in turn, promotes - AAA-approved lodgings that are certified by designated government and private programs. Clearly, eco-conscious meeting and leisure travelers are putting their dollars (and their Euros, yen, pesos and rupees) toward travel-related businesses with a focus on sustainability, and their preferences can no longer be disregarded. And not only are those travelers coming down on the side of green, but so are federal, state and local governments.

"In the hospitality industry, we're seeing a wave of new government mandates stating that employees can only stay in or host meetings in green hotels," said Ray Hobbs, a member of EcoRooms & EcoSuites' Board of Advisors and a certified auditor for Green Globe International. "But there are only twenty three states with official green certification programs, and the industry is still attempting to find the certification process that best serves its needs."

For example, in 2007, Florida Governor Charlie Crist signed an executive order mandating that all state meetings and conventions be held in designated green facilities whenever possible. With the stroke of a pen, Governor Crist started a veritable stampede of hoteliers scrambling to earn green certification for their properties - and achieve a competitive advantage when jockeying for state business. The mandate, while welcomed by environmental advocates in Florida, put a serious strain on the state's excellent green lodging certification program, which has since been nearly dismantled by drastic budget cuts. And Florida isn't alone.

Something Old, Something New

Further complicating the matter are the vast, nuts-and-bolts differences between hotels. Unfortunately, there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to green lodging certification. For instance, the rating system employed by the U.S. Green Business Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is generally a better fit for new-construction hotels or those undergoing renovation than it is for existing facilities that are not slated for major improvements.

For those properties - which, by the way, are the majority - the costs associated with doing what it takes to implement and follow LEED standards are often prohibitive. Those buildings are what they are, and their operators desperately need a straightforward, meaningful certification program that fairly and comprehensively rates their operations so that guests and event planners can easily evaluate the steps the hotel has taken to go green.

"The public's demand for these types of facilities is certainly growing," Hobbs said. "People want to spend their money with businesses that share their same personal beliefs and values. The hotels that achieve certification identify themselves as leaders in green practices, energy conservation and a sustainable future."

There's no question, then, that earning some type of green certification is imperative - not only for the health of the environment but also for a hotel's bottom line. Green equals a healthier bank account and a clear conscience, and who doesn't want both?

So, in no particular order, let's take a look at some of the key certification programs making headway in hospitality, and see how they are impacting the industry.

The Major Players in Green Lodging Certification

Green Key Global (www.greenkeyglobal.com)

With more than 1,200 hotels certified in Canada since its inception in the 1990s, the Green Key Eco-Rating Program has recently made its way south of the border into the United States.

Green Key administers a 140-question online audit, and based upon the results, awards hotels an environmental rating of one to five Green Keys. Green Key members are then given guidance on how to "unlock" opportunities to reduce operating costs and environmental impacts - and in turn earn more keys.

'Green Key is really focused on hotel operations and best practices - helping hotel operators understand how they can reduce their impact on the environment, save money and become a destination for environmentally conscious consumers,' said Zachary Conen, vice president of sales and marketing for Green Key.

The Green Key audit looks at nine major areas of sustainable hotel operations, including:

- Energy conservation
- Water conservation
- Solid waste management
- Hazardous waste management
- Indoor air quality
- Community outreach
- Building infrastructure
- Land use

The big change in Green Key is that, as it immigrates to the United States, the program has added an onsite audit and validation process. Annually, a minimum of 20% of the lodging properties in the U.S. program will be audited on site.

'The onsite audit is an important component of our expansion into the U.S.,' said Conen. 'It is a system of checks and balances - it gives us a chance to see if the Green Key ranking is where it should be, to see if the hotel's green program is being practiced correctly on a day-to-day basis.'

So far about thirty U.S. properties have signed on to the Green Key program, including Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.

'As a true leader in environmental stewardship, Fairmont sees value in working with like-minded partners to reduce its environmental impact and promote operational sustainability,' said Sarah Dayboll, Fairmont's manager of environmental affairs. 'Expanding the Green Key program to our US-based properties supports Fairmont's brand-wide commitment to minimizing its impact on the planet, as it provides our hotels with another tool to audit, benchmark and also enhance their environmental activity.'

The state of Indiana has likewise chosen Green Key as its official statewide environmental initiative for the lodging industry. The program will be managed through a partnership between the Indiana Hotel & Lodging Association (IHLA) and Green Key Global. This partnership provides the IHLA with a customized, branded version of the Green Key Web site, allowing IHLA to promote the program to both members and the public.

'More and more of today's travelers are comparing properties when they choose where to stay and one of the strongest decision factors for them is the 'green factor,'" said John Livengood, president/CEO of the Indiana Hotel & Lodging Association. 'The Green Key program provides our hotel partners in Indiana the opportunity to be nationally recognized for the eco-friendly work that they are already doing, and gives them a starting point from which they can improve as their business plan allows.'

Green Globe International (www.greenglobecertification.com)

As its name suggests, Green Globe is a commonly used standard for green hotels and golf courses worldwide. Utilized by the travel and tourism industry since 1993, the Green Globe brand is internationally recognized in Europe, Latin America, China, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, and is starting to gain traction in the U.S.

As part of its certification program, Green Globe looks at behavioral, facility and product issues at the hotel. To guarantee adherence to the highest international standards, a third-party independent auditor is appointed to work with clients on-site. Green Globe certification takes from thirty to sixty days depending on the size and commitment of the business, and the company offers a partial refund of their fees should the property not achieve certification.

Green Globe Certified businesses have to be re-certified on an annual basis, as additional requirements must be met. Green Globe also updates certification requirements to make sure businesses stay on the highest international level.

'People are used to seeing Green Globe certification around the world - the brand really means something to eco-conscious travelers,' said Hobbs, a certified auditor for Green Globe. 'Green Globe really provides an excellent option for hotels looking to raise their environmental standing. We know not every hotel can afford to completely rebuild, so we really look at identifying practices and habits hotels can adopt to lessen their environmental impact.'

Most recently, The Crowne Plaza Atlanta Perimeter at Ravinia completed its certification by Green Globe. The hotel's sustainable features include Green Meetings, a linen reuse program, low-flow showerheads and sink faucets in all guestrooms, and biodegradable cleaning chemicals. Energy efficient lighting was installed in 2008 in all public spaces, with guestrooms currently on schedule to be converted. The hotel donates partially used guestroom amenities, discarded linen and furniture to local charity organizations.

"Green Globe recognizes that true sustainability is a journey, and Crowne Plaza Perimeter at Ravinia, its management and staff have committed to improving their environment and growing their contribution to the local community,' said Green Globe Certification CEO Guido Bauer.

ENERGY STAR (www.energystar.gov)

The Energy Star program was created 10 years ago by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Nationwide, Energy Star has prevented the emission of nearly 120 million metric tons of carbon dioxide. Energy Star covers 13 types of commercial buildings of which notable buildings include Amazon.com's headquarters in Seattle, the National Geographic Society base in Washington D.C., the oldest being Cambridge Savings Bank in Massachusetts, the tallest Aon Center in Chicago and the largest USAA McDermott Building in Texas. The hospitality industry has just recently joined the growing trend to meet the energy efficiency standards.

EPA's online benchmarking system, Portfolio Manager, allows building owners and managers to enter data about their property's energy usage to measure their building's energy performance on a 100-point scale. A rating of 75 or greater denotes superior energy performance. 'This is the key, Portfolio Manager allows our clients to monitor their energy usage on a monthly basis to compare before and after energy efficiency strategy implementation. Most cases we clearly see efficiency improvements pay for themselves in energy cost savings.'

The program has worked to great effect: buildings that have earned the Energy Star label use an average of almost 40 percent less energy than average buildings, and emit 35 percent less carbon. The benefit of Energy Star extends beyond asset value. Aside from the actual Energy Star designation the program also serves as a stand-alone energy marketing tool: an energy report cards, so to speak, and In large part, Energy Star and LEED-EB buildings must achieve a certain Energy Star score as a prerequisite for certification.

"The business case for energy efficiency is indisputable," says Brodsky, national program manager for the Commercial Properties division of Energy Star. "The business case is so strong that the financial results can be applied to asset value, through increased NOI [net operating income], or leveraged to pursue other aspects of green buildings that do not show as strong of a financial rate of return."

"For a lot of people, it's where the rubber meets the road," Brodsky says of the benchmarking aspect, which saw participation jump by more than 175 percent from 2006 to 2007. To date, almost 8 billion square feet of U.S. property has been benchmarked through Energy Star.

But with Energy Star, which looks exclusively at energy consumption in existing assets, responsibility shifts to property managers. Demand for Energy Star buildings is a "quantifiable indicator of superior management practices across the property, which may otherwise be intangible," Brodsky says.

Green Seal (www.greenseal.org)

Green Seal has provided a science-based environmental certification for the lodging industry since 1995. But what sets it apart from other programs is that the Green Seal is a recognized brand beyond hospitality, representing a mark of sustainability excellence for more than forty product categories and services.

'There's an ever-growing reluctance among the public to trust companies when they say their product is green,' said Mark Petruzzi, vice president of certification and strategic relations for Green Seal, Inc. 'Consumers have been disappointed before, which is why there's a demand for credible, third-party independent certification, which we provide.'

Petruzzi said many of common labeling programs use proprietary rating systems or checklists that are not publicly available and were not developed through any recognized standard-setting process.

'Anybody can come up with a checklist over a weekend of beer and pizza, but it takes real effort to work with stakeholders, present your research and rationale for each requirement, and subject the proposed standard to public and stakeholder comments,' he explained.

Certification requires an initial evaluation by Green Seal, including an on-site audit of the property, and annual monitoring to ensure ongoing compliance. To qualify for Green Seal certification, a hotel must demonstrate sustainable practices in the following areas:

- Waste minimization, reuse and recycling
- Energy efficiency, conservation and management
- Management of fresh water resources
- Waste water management
- Hazardous substances management
- Environmentally sensitive purchasing

'Verifying that the property is actually doing what they claimed to be doing on paper is vital for credibility,' Petruzzi said. 'Even 'random' assessments don't provide enough robustness since noncompliant properties jeopardize all participants in the program.'

Notably, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) notified Green Seal in August that its environmental standard was officially recognized as the first American National Standard for 'green' restaurants and food service operations, which affect many of the hotels that offer onsite restaurants and eating areas.

Also, Kimpton Hotels CEO Mike Depatie recently announced that the majority of the brand's nearly fifty hotels are expected to be Green Seal-certified by the end of the year. In October, three of Kimpton's Chicago boutique hotels - Hotel Allegro, Hotel Burnham and Hotel Monaco Chicago - received Green Seal certification.

'Having our EarthCare initiatives validated by such an important organization as Green Seal acknowledges that we are doing the right things for the environment and our business,' said Nabil Moubayed, general manager of Hotel Monaco and lead for Kimpton Chicago's EarthCare Committee, a team of five employees who oversee the hotels' eco practices. 'We are extremely proud to be associated with Green Seal and look forward to continually helping raise the bar on environmental consciousness.'

Petruzzi said Green Seal has been busier than ever this year, demonstrating that the desire for green hotels is certainly growing.

'There is a danger that certification can become commoditized. Some hotels just want to offer a linen recycling program and informal recycling program and say they are green,' Petruzzi said. 'But Green Seal is a trustworthy label guests are much more likely to be familiar with in the products they have in their homes. Our standards are robust, thorough, accredited and continuously scrutinized to ensure the credibility of our label.'

Audubon Green Leaf (<http://greenleaf.auduboninternational.org>)

The Audubon Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program began in 1998 to meet the lodging industry's desire to provide quality guest services while minimizing its impact on the environment. Participating facilities can reduce costs and gain a marketing advantage through Green Leaf's comprehensive and credible method for assessing the extent of the environmental measures the facilities have undertaken.

The Green Leaf certification process begins with a self-evaluation survey, and is followed up by a Green Leaf assessment and verification. Hotels are awarded one to five

Green Leaves based upon the hotel's commitment to:

- Saving energy
- Reducing waste
- Conserving water and resources
- Preventing pollution

According to Green Leaf, the program is unique in that it is international in scope, uses a standardized checklist for evaluating environmental performance, includes environmental education and hands-on staff assistance, and requires a site visit by a trained individual to verify eco-rated practices. It is also unique in that it is tied to Audubon International - a third party environmental group with worldwide name recognition.

The state of New York is launching its state hotel certification program using the Green Leaf standard. The New York State Hospitality and Tourism Association selected Audubon International's Green Leaf Eco Rating Program for Hotels to be the independent third-party evaluator for its green lodging certification, which is part of a larger state initiative to support and market sustainable tourism.

'Green tourism is good for our economy and good for our environment,' said New York Governor David A. Paterson in a public statement. 'The new Green Lodging Certification program will certify and assist New York's hoteliers in the transition to environmental sustainability, helping them remain competitive and protecting our environment at the same time.'

Forty-three hotels and inns across the state have signed on to the pilot project so far. Robert Dawson, director of operations, oversees two of those hotels -the Days Inn Batavia and the Super 8 Batavia in Buffalo -. Dawson said his staff is thrilled to be part of the project, even though they have a lot of work to do.

'We entered the Green Leaf program as a motivator or a type of checks and balances,' Dawson said. 'We are setting goals and we know that we can best achieve them by utilizing a program that is serious about a green environment. Our properties are spread over 10.5 acres and combined have a total of 157 guests rooms, a full size restaurant and lounge, four conference rooms, several storage areas and offices, a breakfast area and a lobby for each hotel. The hotels are forty years old now and were built in a time when energy efficiency wasn't given a lot of thought. So we have a long and exhausting job to do, but we are determined to reach our ultimate goal to become the greenest possible business.'

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design - LEED (www.usgbc.org)

While the other green certification programs focus on operations, LEED remains the gold standard for green building construction in the U.S. And while the economy has put a damper on new hotel construction, it hasn't stopped hotels from turning to LEED.

'The hospitality industry has emerged as an important new hotspot of green building and LEED activity,' said Ashley Katz, manager of communications for the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), which developed and administers LEED. 'LEED registrations of lodging properties have increased significantly in recent years - 2007 saw almost four times as many hotels register for LEED as 2006, and 2008 brought us nearly as many new lodging property registrations as in the previous eight years combined.'

LEED provides third-party certification that a facility was designed, built or retro-fitted to improve performance in energy and water conservation, CO2 emissions, indoor environmental quality, and protection of resources. Its rigorous certification process has marked it as one of the most trustworthy certification programs in the world.

The program is broken down by property type (school, existing building, new construction, etc.) and is based upon a stringent 110 point scale that assigns a certification level (certified, silver, gold or platinum) which depends on how many points the building earns. Properties can also earn bonus points for innovation in design and for implementing region-specific features.

There are currently 31 LEED certified projects and 877 registered lodging projects around the world. One LEED certified hotel is San Francisco's Hotel Carlton, the city's first LEED-EB O&M Gold Certified hotel, and the first in the country to earn certification under the USGBC's newly revamped rating system designed to address the needs of existing buildings. To earn that certification, Hotel Carlton, a Joie de Vivre Hospitality property, had to significantly reduce its environmental impacts in a number of areas, including energy, water, and natural resource conservation, air and water quality, etc., and it must maintain these practices and improve the building's eco-efficiency over time.

'Hotel Carlton is a great example of Joie de Vivre's organic approach to sustainability,' said Karlene Holloman, Joie de Vivre's senior vice president of operations. 'The staff at the Carlton have been passionate champions for sustainability at their property for years. They led the way and their commitment to greening the hotel's operations led naturally to seeking LEED Gold certification in the existing buildings category, making the Carlton the greenest hotel in San Francisco.'

EcoRooms & EcoSuites (<http://www.ecorooms.com>)

While its main function has been to serve as an online directory of the most environmentally responsible hotels, motels, inns and B&Bs in the U.S. and abroad, EcoRooms & EcoSuites has taken on a leadership role, pushing for a greener, more sustainable hospitality industry.

Working with a board of advisors comprised of some of the brightest minds in sustainability, EcoRooms & EcoSuites has developed a strict set of EcoCriteria that is raising the bar for environmental excellence in hospitality. There are two tiers of green designations - 'approved' status is based upon satisfactory completion of an application, and 'certified' status requires an on-site audit of the claims made on the application by one of the program's board of advisors.

EcoRooms & EcoSuites is the only program that mandates 100% compliance with all eight of their criteria's, including smoke free guestrooms. With only about a dozen properties certified by EcoRooms & EcoSuites, they're the most stringent certification programs in the industry, so becoming a member really means something to the hotels. And patronizing one of their certified hotels truly means something to the eco-conscious traveler as well.

Eco Rooms & Eco Suites' EcoCriteria includes:

- Green Seal certified or equivalent cleaning products are used in guestrooms.
- Green Seal certified or equivalent paper products (facial and bathroom tissue) are used in guestrooms.
- Bathrooms feature amenity dispensers or small, practical amenity sizes with guests encouraged to take the remainder of their bathroom amenities home. donate them to homeless shelters, or provide to organizations that ship them to less affluent countries.
- The hotel has implemented a linen and towel reuse program
- Guests are provided separate and easily identified receptacles and/or bags in which to deposit recyclables.
- Energy-efficient lighting is in place in every applicable area.
- High efficiency plumbing - 1.6 or less gallons-per-flush for toilets, 2.5 G.P.M. Showerheads and 1.5 gallons per minute or less for sinks with water-efficient aerators.

- 100% Smoke-Free Hotel.

Member properties range from a newly built gem in California to a multi-million dollar oceanfront resort in Maine. Each individual property receives a marketing boost and expert guidance from EcoRooms and EcoSuites.

Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) (www.green-business.co.uk)

Launched in 1997, the GTBS is the only green business certification program validated by Visit Britain, the country's official tourism organization. Among other types of businesses, it accredits a wide range of accommodations including hotels, motels, hostels, campsites, and campus housing, to name only a few. The mission of the GTBS certification criteria is 'to offer guidelines to tourism businesses on how to make their operations more sustainable while still delivering a high quality service.'

The criteria are divided into ten areas and hits upon 150 different measures.

The ten areas are:

- **Compulsory:** does the property comply with environmental legislation?
- **Management and Marketing:** does the property demonstrate appropriate staff training, monitoring and record-keeping?
- **Social Involvement and Communication:** is the facility a 'good neighbor' and how well does it communicate its policies to its customers?
- **Energy:** is the property's heating, cooling, lighting, and etc. energy efficient?
- **Water:** does the property work to conserve and safely manage water?
- **Purchasing:** does the facility procure environmentally friendly goods and services?
- **Waste:** does the property promote and practice the 3R's - reduce, reuse, recycle?
- **Transport:** does the facility promote public transportation and support the use of alternative fuels?
- **Natural and Cultural Heritage:** how does the property support biodiversity?
- **Innovation:** how does the property increase its sustainability in ways not covered in the previous nine areas?

There are four levels of certification under GTBS: Going Green, Bronze, Silver and Gold. Each property is assessed every two years to ensure that the program's rigorous standards are met.

There are over 700 hotels, B&B's, guest houses and inns either currently certified or in the pipeline for certification by GTBS. Among them are Jurys Inns, which has committed to becoming the UK's greenest hotel group by having all of its 29 city centre hotels in the UK and Ireland awarded either a silver or gold designation by GTBS.

Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program: STEP (www.sustainabletravelinternational.org)

STEP was developed by a non-profit organization called Sustainable Travel International (STI). It is a comprehensive eco-certification program aimed at achieving worldwide reach, and as such it is aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria - a benchmark that seeks to rally the tourism industry around a set of core values that are 'the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach.'

STEP was publicly launched in 2007, and is currently certifying hotels in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, China, Australia and Brazil. 'STI's Self-Assessment Tool is a standalone educational, measurement and management framework which doubles as an application for companies wanting to become Eco-assessed or Eco-certified through STEP,' explained Brian T. Mullis, president of STI. 'Applicants can decide what level they want to be certified. Those who wish to apply for one to two stars and become eco-assessed must comply with all STEP 'Required' criteria through a desk audit, whereas those who wish to apply for three to five stars and become eco-certified have to have an on-site audit.'

To date, several dozen companies have gone through the STEP process. One of them is the Grand Teton Lodge Company, which operates several facilities inside Grand Teton National Park. 'Grand Teton Lodge Company has a historical commitment to environmental protection efforts,' wrote Julie Klein, director of environmental affairs for Rock Resorts and Vail Resorts, Inc., of which Grand Teton Lodge Company is a subsidiary. 'STEP certification and the assessment process is driving commitments deeper into our operations that benefit the natural environment; the health and safety of our employees and guests; and the surrounding community - a true measurement of the sustainability of our business.'

High-end properties take note: STI has also launched a separate certification program for luxury properties. The Luxury Eco Certification Standard (LECS) is touted as 'the world's only voluntary, global sustainable tourism certification program offered by a non-profit organization that is specific to the luxury accommodation sector.' Taking into account the special challenges facing high-end properties that seek to go green, STI developed a stringent but doable process tailored to the needs of the luxury green lodge. LECS certification requires an on-site audit.

A NATIONWIDE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM IN THE UNITED STATES?

The buzz around Washington D.C. is that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is laying the groundwork for a federal green lodging certification program for U.S. hotels.

Indications are that this program might actually be a worthwhile addition to the green lodging certification mix. It will apparently be modeled after excellent state-sponsored programs like the ones in Florida and California, and the hope is that it will become as highly regarded and recognizable as the Energy Star ratings for appliances.

Plus, word on the street is that these new guidelines will eventually be the measure by which all federal agencies and departments will award their meeting and convention business in the future - along with price and past performance considerations, of course.

One can't help but wonder if a highly publicized, well-funded federal green hotel certification program will eclipse others of questionable quality - especially those in the pay-to-play arena.

Our recommendation is for hospitality properties to watch this process closely and plan to apply just as soon as the EPA opens the floodgates, because there's likely to be a rush of facilities scrambling to align with a high profile federal program.

U.S. Statewide Certification Programs

Twenty-three states have some form of statewide green hotel certification program, and that number is expanding rapidly. State agencies and others administer some of these programs by lodging associations or other organizations. While many programs have taken budget hits that have severely limited their scope (most notably, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's once-exemplary green lodging program has been reduced to a barebones self-reporting scheme) they have managed to salvage at least part of their operations. As of press time, the following states offered a green lodging certification program: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Summary

We've done our best to cover the most popular eco-certification programs, but naturally our list is not all-inclusive. Clearly there are more green lodging certification programs out there than we have the time or space to include in this profile. But we have tried to give you a taste of the most common ones - the ones that appear to be here to stay - and the choice of which certification to pursue is entirely yours.

The good news is this: there is no law against affiliating with more than one certification program. Indeed, many properties have amassed a laundry list of environmental certifications, designations and honors. But with consumers becoming more eco-savvy and wary of greenwashing, the sensible hotel operator will align with at least one certification program backed up by on-site audits. Achieving - and promoting - a legitimate third-party confirmation of your team's sustainability efforts will set your facility apart from all the others who have done nothing more than open their wallets and pay-to-play.

About Scott Parisi, CHA

Scott is President of EcoGreenHotel, a firm that performs sustainability analysis of hotels and creates custom plans for properties to develop and implement environmental management systems. Scott is particularly proficient in finding local, state and government programs that offer loans, credits and rebates available to owners, developers and operators of hotels. Scott is a veteran hospitality professional specializing in multi property management with over fifteen years experience with major hotel chains, such as Intercontinental, Starwood, Hilton and Choice Hotels. Scott served as General Manager of the first U.S. L.E.E.D. certified and "Environmentally Friendly" Hotel, the Sheraton Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia.

About Ray Burger, CHA

Ray is President of Pineapple Hospitality, a distribution and marketing company offering environmentally sustainable products to 'green' the hospitality industry including FreshStay, EcoRooms & EcoSuites. He has provided the Lodging industry with environmental products, programs and services for over 12 years. With over 30 years of hospitality experience, Ray is a leader when it comes to the sustainability movement within the industry. He's also a columnist for The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for Hotel Rooms Management.

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