

FYI Travel: Eco-friendly hospitality

by Tom_Roebuck

Luxury hotels and resorts are going green with programs and amenities that help protect the environment. Who is "eco-friendliest" at the top-end of the hospitality industry?

GOING GREEN - Hyatt Key West hopes to become the first resort in Key West to be green-approved by The Florida Department of Environmental Protection. CNS Photo. - Le Meridien Bora Bora is stepping up to assure a vibrant future for hawksbill, leatherback and green sea turtles with its on-site turtle sanctuary. Located in the resort's private lagoon, the sanctuary provides much-needed protection for some of the South Pacific's most vulnerable creatures, while educating guests and islanders on the importance of the marine turtles' survival. Guests are offered an array of educational interactions, including the opportunity to swim with turtles in their natural environment. They can also "adopt" a turtle and track its progress online after returning home. The only effort of its kind in French Polynesia, the sanctuary celebrates its fifth anniversary this year. FYI: Web site www.starwood.com/lemeridien.

- Hyatt Key West Resort & Marina is on its way to becoming green certified by the Florida Green Lodging Program, including wrapping up its application for 1 Palm status to become Key West's first green-approved resort by year's end. The Florida Green Lodging Program is an effort by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to encourage the lodging industry to conserve and protect Florida's natural resources. This program acknowledges and promotes lodging facilities that demonstrate water and energy conservation, waste minimization, recycling, indoor air quality, environmentally preferable purchasing, program sustainability and pollution prevention. Hyatt Key West also recently announced a partnership with the Reef Relief Organization (www.reefrelief.org) to donate \$5 from special signature treatments at the new Jala Spa for Reef Relief. FYI: Web site www.keywest.hyatt.com.

- With a nod toward clean air, The White Barn Inn in Kennebunkport, Maine, is helping keep auto emissions to a minimum with an electric Gem car. The boutique hotel selected the Gem as its house transportation for its environmental pedigree and quiet convenience on the streets. Guests often request the car to take them from guest cottages to dinner at the famous White Barn Inn Restaurant - the only Mobil Five-Star in the state. FYI: Web site www.whitebarninn.com.

- Cafe Fleuri at Langham Hotel, Boston, has been certified as a green restaurant, making it the first hotel restaurant in Boston to be recognized by the Green Restaurant Association. In order to become certified, the property had to address several aspects of its operation, including discontinuing the use of Styrofoam throughout the hotel; switching to recycled and chlorine-free paper; installing low-flow spray valves in the

kitchen to conserve water usage; and recycling all cardboard, plastic and glass bottles. Water conservation has also been instituted in the guest rooms. While Green Restaurant certification can take up to a year, Langham wrapped up the process in just two months. FYI: Web site www.boston.langhamhotels.com.

- Mountain Travel Sobek has partnered with the Nature Conservancy to preserve the dramatic natural setting and ancient traditions of China's Yunnan Peninsula, which is slated for development by the Chinese government. The adventure travel pioneer, which completed the first commercial descent of the Mekong River in 2006, is working with the Nature Conservancy to train locals to work the rivers and welcome travelers in ways that do not threaten the region's delicate ecosystem. FYI: Web site www.mtsobek.com.

- Hawksbill turtles have a safe haven at Jumby Bay Resort. The private island resort off the coast of Antigua is site of the Hawksbill Turtle Program, a privately funded research project sponsored by island residents under direction of the University of Georgia. Each year, Hawksbills return to nest on the resort's Pasture Bay Beach, a protected nesting area that has been drawing the now-endangered sea turtles since the age of the dinosaurs. Ecologically minded guests on the island from June through November may sign up for "turtle watch" to play an active role in the program, the longest running scientific study of its kind. FYI: Web site www.jumbybayresort.com.

- Can Mongolia, Bhutan, Tibet, China and Siberia benefit from an ecologically based and sustainable approach to tourism? Nomadic Expeditions sure thinks so. The pioneering purveyor of authentic cultural travel goes out of its way to minimize the impact on the environment it explores, to promote awareness of conservation and sustainable tourism, and to provide ongoing training for guides and drivers so that trip participants can receive the latest environmental information. Through arrangements with local farmers, Nomadic Expeditions' Three Camel Lodge in the Gobi Desert was forged through a cooperative agreement with local authorities for sustainable development and conservation. The property fully utilizes renewable energy resources, including solar and wind power. FYI: Web site www.nomadicexpeditions.com.

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