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■ **Accommodation** / Sustainability

## Getting the **GREEN LIGHT**

**Sasha Wood** finds out how the concept of sustainable hotel stays is being integrated into the business travel eco-system

**A**thletes participating in this summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo will rest their weary bodies on beds with frames made from recyclable cardboard and mattresses formed of polyethylene materials that will be reused for plastic products after the events.

It's hard to imagine hotel titans Marriott or Hilton going to those lengths, but it is a measure of the way the sustainable travel debate is now permeating all areas of travel and tourism, and not just aviation.

Under mounting pressure as the evidence of global warming continues to stack up, last year the UK declared a climate emergency and the travel industry is taking its call to action seriously.

"We cannot escape the fact that this issue is the most important and multifaceted that travel and hospitality has ever had to face," says Business Travel Association (BTA) Chief Executive, Clive Wratten.

Numerous industry surveys show sustainability has shot up the business travel agenda in the last year, with one poll from TripActions highlighting that 80% of business travellers are now concerned about their environmental impact. And with TMCs reporting increased demand from clients for ethical travel options, the hotel industry is looking for new solutions to reduce pollution, waste and environmental damage from its operations.

The banning of single-use plastics, a focus on sourcing local products, and the reduction of water and energy consumption using demand-response units are popular action points for hotel groups large and small, but how can corporates get a clear picture of their hotel-related environmental impact?

After all, some European companies are required to report CO2 emissions resulting from business travel as part of the EU's Climate Monitoring Mechanism, with the goal to reduce emissions in the EU 43% by

2030. Carbon budgets are set into UK law, but it's unclear how the reporting system will change as Britain departs the EU.

### Measure for measure

In the UK, measurements from DEFRA and allied organisations are viewed as the benchmark standards for estimating carbon emissions. Meanwhile, green credentials are measured by myriad different environmental certifications, though the underlying principles, standards and calculation methods often remain the same.

More and more, new-build hotels are LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) or Green Seal certified, making it easier for travel managers to identify greener accommodation options.

We are quite used to calculating the carbon output of a flight or road journey, but measuring the carbon footprint of hotel rooms is more difficult, says Egencia's Senior Product Marketing Manager, Caleb MacIlvaine.

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Accommodation / Spend management ■



"A hotel stay comprises a collection of activities, each of which emit greenhouse gases. These include things like heating or cooling a hotel room, going up and down in an elevator, taking a shower with hot water or eating at the hotel restaurant that uses electricity or natural gas to cook your food. Like the car scenario, the bigger the hotel room, the more CO2 that's created," he says.

#### Corporate clamour

Across the board, TMCs are reporting record interest in sustainability. "We are seeing more clients wanting to understand

**“ We hear constantly from the travel community that sustainability of business travel is a critical topic to address”**

and manage their carbon footprint, and asking how they can make their programmes more sustainable," says Amex GBT's Vice President of Risk and Compliance, Michelle Dyer. "To a large extent, these enquiries are driven by travellers who are increasingly aware about the environmental impact of business travel."

TripActions' VP of Product, Anique Drumright, agrees: "We hear consistently from the travel community via our customer advisory board, focus groups and in-product feedback that sustainability of business travel is a critical topic to address, and that they want to do more than just engage in the global conversation by taking action to understand and mitigate their impact."

Jamie Anderson, Head of Marketing and Communications at Diversity Travel, which specialises in travel management for not-for-profits and the charity sector, says the company has been seeing a similar trend: "Sustainability has become top of the

agenda for many of Diversity Travel's clients. Not only are potential clients enquiring more about sustainable options in tenders, but existing clients are also showing greater interest in how we can help them reduce their carbon footprint."

Despite the apparent clamour for sustainable travel options, a recent poll by the Business Travel Show showed only 39% of buyers operate 'ethical' travel programmes and only 17% of organisations offset their aviation-related emissions.

#### Green pitch

Nevertheless, corporate social responsibility and sustainable practices are becoming a fixture in pitches for new business. The BTA's Clive Wratten says: "Increasingly, RFPs have sustainability running through them. TMCs are already serving up travel and accommodation options to clients based on criteria such as the lowest carbon impact or most ethical business practices. ▶

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► "If you are not, then it's time to get your developers on the case – and quickly."

In fact a survey from Amex GBT found 26% of travel managers and procurement professionals already include mandatory CSR questions in hotel RFPs, and 16% are already factoring sustainability into hotel sourcing. The global TMC is listening to its clients too: "GBT is actively helping clients create greener travel strategies to meet their environmental goals," says Dyer.

"We help them develop the best strategy for their business and corporate culture, with an optimal balance between smarter travel and mitigating residual greenhouse gas emissions through offsetting.

Other TMCs are on the case too, with many having introduced carbon calculators into their booking tools to let managers see their company's projected emissions and act accordingly.

Egencia, for example, has introduced a Carbon Emissions Workspace within its Analytics Studio that tracks the potential emissions for hotel stays. Similarly, Amex GBT's Neo platform includes emissions information, while new business travel player TripActions added a carbon monitoring and offsetting tool to its booking software last October.

Diversity Travel's Anderson says many of the organisations that the TMC works with now have quotas limiting the carbon emissions they are prepared to emit through their business travel activities. Others are seeking to become carbon neutral via offsetting schemes.

"Integrating more sustainable options and filters into online booking tools, providing clients with an overview of their overall emissions and aiming for carbon neutrality can all go a long way in bringing awareness to the issue and encouraging bookers to make more responsible decisions," says

**“ Many TMCs have introduced carbon calculators into their travel booking tools to let users and managers see their company's projected emissions and act accordingly.”**

Anderson. The TMC's in-house development team is currently looking at integrating greener options into its hotel booking tool.

#### **Sustainable stays**

Initiatives such as scrapping single-use plastics and carbon offsetting are starting to become the norm in the hospitality industry. In 2019, for example, IHG and Marriott both announced they were ditching individual toiletry bottles. Similarly, Hilton committed to recycling all the soap bars used in its hotels, having already reduced water consumption by 20% using LightStay technology.

Another hospitality giant, Accor says it has neutralised some of its carbon output by planting 100,000 trees across the UK in the last five years in partnership with the Woodland Trust. They are small steps, but it shows the industry is moving in the right direction, away from wasteful mass consumption to a more considered approach.

Sustainability accreditation schemes can help buyers identify greener hotel options. LEED-certified hotels, for instance, typically feature flow-restrictive shower heads, low-flow toilets, energy-efficient lighting and linen programs as a bare minimum.

To reduce energy consumption long-term, some hotels are adopting demand-response units to cut energy use during peak hours. Major hotel chains such as Marriott began trialling the technology back in 2013 as part of Ofgem's Low Carbon London programme, which used London as a test bed to support the development of a smarter electricity network.

Banks are even offering Green Loans to help hotels engrain more sustainable practices in their design and operation. A notable recent example is that of Edwardian Hotels London, which has secured a £175million Green Loan from HSBC UK to help make its new super boutique, The Londoner, one of the most environmentally friendly hotels in the UK.

With travel buyers, TMCs, hotels and now banks on board, it seems the concept of sustainable development is finally having its day. TMCs are becoming equipped to help design completely carbon-neutral trips for their clients, and with the tools we need to be greener travellers coming online, it won't be long before we can choose the most sustainable stay in just a few clicks.

