



## **INNS GO FOR GREEN; A state-run certification program is the catalyst, but innkeepers find that doing right by the environment not only generates business but cuts energy costs.**

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Thoughts of nature can come easily to guests at The Inn by the Sea, as they gaze across gardens and a salt marsh to the sparkling waters of Kettle Cove. Nature also comes to mind - although it's less obvious - by noticing the recycling bin under the sink, high-efficiency light bulbs in the fixtures and cards that invite guests to forgo fresh towels every day. Other strategies to conserve energy and be kind to the environment are in play around the inn. No disposable kitchenware. A preference for locally purchased food. Chemical free, native landscaping. Water-saving toilets and showers.

Taken together, these and other measures place The Inn by the Sea among the first 10 hotels to qualify for Maine's new Green Lodging Certification Program.

Becoming certified gives innkeepers a flag-style logo to display and some bragging rights. But owners say it can do more.

Green lodging can save money. The Inn by the Sea has cut its electric bill by \$8,000 a year, and is still in the process of changing out wasteful, incandescent light bulbs.

Going green also can make money. More travelers these days are seeking hotels that have earned a green designation. Maine, those in the industry say, is well positioned to take advantage of this niche, because the state attracts people looking to enjoy nature.

In time, lodging owners hope, tourists will look for Maine's green lodging logo when they choose their destination. The Inn by the Sea is displaying the logo on its Web site home page, next to its AAA four diamonds rating.

"Not only are we helping the environment, we're helping the bottom line," said Rauni Kew, the inn's marketing director.

Green lodging certification isn't a new idea. A handful of Maine inns, including The Inn by the Sea, The Colony Hotel in Kennebunkport and the Harraseeket Inn in Freeport, belong to the Texas-based Green Hotels Association. But Maine's program is aimed at establishing a state brand for businesses that take extra steps to be good stewards, according to Peter Cooke, who manages the pollution prevention program at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Similar "Environmental Leader" designations exist for gas stations that have replaced underground tanks and companies that are reducing air emissions associated with climate change.

"With tourism being the largest industry in the state, we decided our program could help reduce its

environmental impact," he said.

Cooke is modeling the "Environmental Leader: Hospitality" certification after similar ones in Vermont and Nova Scotia. It was launched last November at a meeting of the Maine Innkeepers Association.

Ten hoteliers have made the grade and 14 more are awaiting certification. Three dozen have signed up for an upcoming green lodging workshop, run by the innkeepers group. Cooke said his larger goal is to expand certification to nature-based enterprises, such as sporting camps and kayak touring companies, and to document the program's performance.

"It's really starting to take off," Cooke said.

To win the free certification, hotels have to conduct a self-audit on their environmental and energy practices.

The survey covers areas including kitchen and housekeeping, landscaping, guest rooms and administrative offices. Participants gain points for meeting various standards. For instance: They can gain 10 points by using green-certified cleaning materials; five points for using timers and sensors for parking lot lights. They must accumulate 100 points to be certified for two years.

Participants must boost their score to 130 points to maintain the certification after that. Otherwise, staying in the program costs \$100 a year.

Accumulating points shouldn't be a problem at Maple Hill Farm in Hallowell.

Hotels that buy zero-emission electricity, or generate their own power with wind or sunshine, can earn from 20 to 50 points. Maple Hill Farm recently installed a 10-kilowatt wind turbine. The \$70,000 system provides roughly one-third of the electricity needs for the small inn and conference center.

"We did it in part to educate people and to minimize the impact from our facility," said Scott Cowger.

Cowger, a retiring state legislator with a strong interest in environmental issues, said some customers value the inn's environmental commitment, which includes preserving 130 acres of farm and forest land. A couple of visitors have come specifically to see the wind turbine, he said.

But Cowger also said he must be mindful of balancing environmental goals with the overall experience of his guests. For example: The inn changes sheets only every three days, but provides new towels daily.

"This is the non-green me," he said. "I just think a guest on vacation wants to have a fresh, clean towel."

Those considerations also are at play at The Inn by the Sea.

Hotels can earn 10 points for using refillable soap and shampoo dispensers in bathrooms. But inns with four-diamond AAA designation must provide individually-wrapped care products, so that's what is resting on the bathtub ledge.

"It's finding the right balance between business, the guest experience and helping the environment," Kew said.

The Inn by the Sea is taking steps beyond increasing efficiency and reducing pollution, by making a sustained effort to engage and educate its guests.

The inn sponsors an annual Earth Day beach cleanup - held Saturday - which culminates with an ice cream sundae social. It conducts weekly garden tours for guests and their families that focus on indigenous plants and plantings favored by wildlife, such as milkweed for monarch butterflies and

bayberry for birds. The tours also forge a solid business connection - area garden clubs sometimes have lunch at the inn.

The inn's philosophy attracts repeat customers such as Forrest Mayo of Philadelphia. He and his wife visit two or three times a year, and have participated in past Earth Day cleanups.

Mayo has fished, hunted and camped since he was a child. He gravitates to places that offer outdoor-oriented activities, he said, and tries to stay at destinations that promote a cleaner environment.

"Unfortunately you don't find too many," he said. "But we look for inns like that to give our business."

A sense that Maine can attract more visitors like Forrest Mayo has prompted the 600-member Maine Innkeepers Association to organize its first green lodging seminar. It will take place Tuesday at the Hilton Garden Inn in Freeport.

"My sense is people have a lot of interest in this but aren't sure how to go about it," said Greg Dugal, the group's executive director.

As competition in the travel industry has become more intense, Maine's hospitality sector is working on new ways to grow nature-based tourism. Green lodging, Dugal said, fits with the overall strategy.

"You have to have an angle these days to survive as a destination, and that's what Maine is," he said.

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