

Will Americans Accept Greener Hotel Rooms?

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Sean MacPherson, the New York hotelier, has been to Europe dozens of times. And he knows that across the Continent, many hotel rooms have master switches that help reduce power use.

Usually, a guest inserts a card into a slot when entering the room to turn on the electricity. Removing the card (which doubles as the room key) on the way out the door shuts off the power.

It is an easy way to conserve energy. Yet it is almost never seen in the United States. Guests who are in a hurry - or simply don't care about saving electricity - leave TVs, air-conditioners and lights on when there is no one in the room. Brian McGuinness, a vice president of Starwood Hotels and Resorts, explained the mind-set of some travelers: 'Part of being on the road means the ability to live a little more luxuriously than at home, and that means not having to turn off the lights and the TV.'

Mr. McGuinness added, 'People say they want to be green, but they don't want to compromise.' As a result, he said, 'We don't really know yet what it means to be green in the hospitality field.'

Last month, Starwood, which owns Westin and Sheraton Hotels, began a new 'green' brand, called Element, which it bills as being eco-conscious and 'kind to the environment,' with ample natural light, in-room recycling bins and faucet filters meant to reduce reliance on bottled water. But so far, Element hotels do not have master switches in their guest rooms.

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