



The Daily Gleaner

February 16, 2008

Travel with the Climate in Mind

It is that time of the year when people are counting down the days to March break, ski vacations, and warm interludes down south. But as the world becomes more aware of the climate crisis facing us, businesses and individuals are taking more responsibility for their actions and this is rapidly extending into the realm of travel.

There are many businesses associated with travel and vacationing: travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, rental car agencies, coach lines, cruise lines, airlines and more, who have taken steps to be more ecologically aware and responsible. This means that when you are travelling this winter and want to be more environmentally responsible, you can be a bit choosier about where you go, where you stay, and how you get there.

Many car rental agencies are now offering more fuel-efficient vehicles and even hybrid options (so if you don't really need an SUV or minivan, choose a smaller or hybrid car!). Hotels are recycling, reducing their waste, encouraging water conservation, and reducing energy consumption with products such as compact fluorescent light bulbs and motion sensors for in-room lighting. Airlines are offering carbon offset programs, and resorts are turning to alternative, more eco-friendly, power sources.

If you are thinking about a ski vacation for your get-away – check out your favorite ski resort to see if they are taking steps to 'green up' what are typically very energy consuming operations (running lifts, snow-making, and lights for night skiing). Some are using shuttle buses powered by alternative fuels, and even using wind and solar-based energy sources. For example, Stowe Mountain Lodge in Vermont was built using eco-friendly practices and is the recipient of an international sustainable community award for maintaining a commitment to environmental stewardship through their operational practices. A great website at www.ecotravelogue.com provides information about environmentally progressive ski resorts in an article titled "White goes Green – Eco-Friendly Ski Resorts".

With so many options out there today, you can enjoy a vacation with a smaller negative impact on the environment than in the past. It just takes a bit of planning and careful research to make informed choices to become a responsible traveler.

When doing your research, be sure not to confuse all things 'eco-tourism' or 'eco-travel' with environmentally-friendly and sustainable travelling. Many companies claim to be eco-friendly simply because they offer outdoor activities in pristine settings, but they may not actually be a green and sustainable operation. So beware!

Check out www.ecotourism.org for a plethora of information on environmentally friendly travel options. On the site they list the following five easy steps to planning your trip:

- 1. Search the web:** Look for websites specializing in responsible travel, ecotourism, or sustainable tourism.
- 2. Consult guidebooks:** Choose guidebooks with information on your destination's environmental, social and political issues, and read before booking. Guidebooks vary in quality, even within a series, but Lonely Planet, Rough Guides, and Moon are among the best.
- 3. Make contact:** Call or email tour operators that have firsthand knowledge of the place you are considering visiting. Check the websites of all accommodations.
- 4. Ask questions:** Let tour operators/hotels know that you are a responsible consumer. Before you book, ask about their social and environmental policies. For instance: What is your environmental policy? What percentage of your employees are local citizens? Do you support any projects to benefit the local community?
- 5. Choose wisely:** Are the businesses you're considering certified? Do they have eco-label ratings, or have they won eco-awards?

And don't forget - eco-responsible travel starts at home. Before you leave on vacation pack your travel mug, water bottle, and anything else you can use to make your trip a more environmentally friendly one.

Remember that oft-quoted travel rule: "Take only pictures, leave only footprints"? Well, in this case we are talking about carbon footprints – so on our travels in the coming months let's try to make them smaller!

Valerie Hillier is a Frederictonian who is trying to lower her carbon footprint at home and when she travels. You can check out her tips and tricks, and those of other Green Matters column contributors at www.greenmattersfredericton.com (click on 'Green Matters in the Gleaner').