

Taking the Kids -- and traveling greener in honor of Earth Day

By Eileen Ogintz, Tribune Content Agency Apr 12, 2018

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The Hotel Spero encourages guests to leave donated clothing in their room, and for each pet you bring, \$5 is donated to SPCA.

Got your reusable water bottle?

In honor of Earth Day, (Sunday, April 22), let's remember how easy it is to do your bit to help end plastic pollution when you are traveling -- and teach the kids a lesson in the process.

You can download a Plastic Pollution Primer and see how well you do using #lessplastic. Earth Day 2018 will focus awareness on the damage caused by plastic, including poisoning and injuring marine life, littering beaches and clogging landfills. Did you know plastics, invented in 1907, are one of the most commonly littered items?

When you are traveling, there are many small things you and your kids can do to travel greener:

-- Reusable water bottles. Some hotels, like the newly renovated Hotel Spero in San Francisco and Chaa Creek Lodge in Belize, give every guest a water bottle when they check in. Encourage hotels to offer water-filling stations with fruit- or cucumber-infused water.

Cambodia's first plastic-free hotel, Jaya House RiverPark, is leading a consortium of more than 40 members at the foot of Angkor Wat to replace one-use plastic bottles with reusable aluminum ones refillable at designated spots across the city. So far the Refill Not Landfill has been credited with keeping more than a million plastic bottles out of landfills.

-- Say no to plastic straws. The 21c Museum Hotels have joined the #stopsucking movement by eliminating single-use plastic straws from their beverage service, part of the Lonely Whale, a nonprofit organization founded by actor and activist Adrian Grenier. Guests who request straws will receive biodegradable paper ones instead. Red Carnation Hotels in London and elsewhere have banned all single-use plastic straws and are also switching to biodegradable paper ones.

-- Carry a fold-up reusable tote for souvenirs and groceries, and say no to plastic bags. Get one with the logo of where you're visiting and it will be a conversation starter when you take it shopping at home.

-- Turn off the lights and the AC in your hotel room when you leave. European hotels typically require you to put your room key in a slot in order to turn on the lights, but hotels here -- even small ones -- are getting on the bandwagon, too. The 45-room Mayton Inn in Cary, North Carolina, for example, has infrared sensors that can detect if a guest has entered or exited a room and then adjust the temperature accordingly.

-- Reuse towels. See if your hotel will give you a credit or extra loyalty points if you refuse housekeeping and towel changes, as do Starwood Hotels through their Make a Green Choice initiative.

-- Take public transportation. It's an especially good way to see a city like locals see it and learn how to get around a city. And in big cities like New York, London or Paris, public transportation is quicker and less expensive. The kids can help navigate!

-- Take shorter showers. Hotels are encouraging less water use with low-flow faucets, toilets and showers like at Element Hotels, part of Marriott International.

We've stayed at the sleek family-owned Cedar House Sport Hotel just outside Truckee, California, and a few minutes from Northstar Resort, which was sustainably built from the ground up, complete with a water drainage system on the roof that feeds the landscaping below. Grand Residences Riviera Cancun employs reverse osmosis technology that allows all of the water used at the resort to be purified and then used again. Check out www.greentravelerguides.com to find more places where you can "go green."

Some hotels have initiated environmental efforts that help those in need as travelers report they not only plan to "give back" when they travel, but feel better when they do. Ask a hotel before you come if they have any such initiatives. Princess Cruises has a special Fathom sailing (May 26) to help those impacted by the hurricanes in the Caribbean. There will be special activities, including beach clean-up, and therapy through the arts.

Help those in need. For example, we recently brought school supplies to Belize to be distributed in a local town. The Hotel Spero, for example, encourages guests to leave donated clothing in their room, and for each pet you bring, \$5 is donated to the SPCA.

Hilton's All Suites (Embassy Suites, Homewood Suites and Home2 Suites) made it a brand standard in 2016 to recycle all used soaps from each of its suites -- in every one of its properties (nearly 1,000 hotels) -- to send to their partner Clean the World. The soaps are given globally to those in need. Last year, many of the soaps were donated to those heavily affected by hurricanes, including Puerto Rico and many islands in the Caribbean. Hilton is the largest partner that Clean the World currently has.

Westin Hotels & Resorts, meanwhile, has just announced the launch of Project Rise: ThreadForward, a sustainability program that collects, processes and reweaves hotel bed linens into pajamas for needy children. In just five months, 50 Westin hotels around the world have donated 30,000 pounds of discarded linens. This month, the first 1,500 pairs of pajamas will be donated.

So where is that water bottle?

(For more Taking the Kids, visit www.takingthekids.com and also follow "taking the kids" on www.twitter.com, Facebook and Instagram where Eileen Ogintz welcomes your questions and comments.)