

Saving time, money and maybe even lives

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FreshStay properties make a commitment to improving the health of their employees, guests, communities and the environment.

Right now there is legislation pending in several states to ban smoking in public places, restaurants, parks and even in people's cars - if there are kids riding along. And notably, Congress just passed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, designed to protect children and teens from the harmful effects of smoking.

So while there is a growing movement to restrict smoking, it's odd that so many hotels still cling to the old-fashioned notions of allowing for a certain number of smoking rooms - even though anyone with experience in the industry can tell you that it's impossible to quarantine the smell of smoke to a single room, or even a floor.

'When we reopened after a major renovation in the summer of 2006, we made the choice to open smoke-free,' says Dawn L. Bagby, Regional Director of Sales for the Hilton Garden Inn, Champaign, Ill. 'Illinois was pushing to go smoke-free and we noticed that we didn't get very many calls for smoking rooms so we thought we'd try it. If it didn't work out, we figured we could convert some of the rooms back to smoking.'

That never happened. Guests were thrilled with the gleaming new facility, and loved that it was entirely smoke-free. The hotel found benefits too. The staff didn't have to worry about cleaning up after smokers, and there wasn't the damage and cigarette burns in the new carpets. Event organizers - and particularly brides hosting their weddings - loved that the meeting rooms were 'so fresh, so new.'

'We didn't really do any big studies - we just thought it was the right thing to do,' Bagby says. 'It turns out it was. We're really happy to be smoke-free.'

Along with being smoke-free, the Hilton Garden Inn Champaign is also a member of FreshStay.com, the largest online directory of 100% smoke-free hotels in the world.

For those travelers who just can't stand the smell of smoke - either for health or just personal preference reasons - FreshStay.com ensures every one of its hotel partners is 100 percent smoke-free, including the guest rooms, meeting rooms, restaurants, bars and lobbies.

FreshStay offers more than 3,700 hotels, motels, B&B's and other lodgings across all 50 states, Canada and abroad. It's easy to find exactly what you need with a simple state-by-state search and integrated booking process. In just a few clicks, you'll be ready to pack your bags for a healthier travel, and a cleaner, more refreshing stay away from home.

'A new study in Australia found that smokers there spend an average of 17 days per year smoking, and nearly \$2,500 out of their wallets to support the habit,' explains Dave Janicke, FreshStay.com's CBO - Chief Breathing Officer. 'Add in the years smoking takes off of a person's life on average, and the various health problems smokers are sure to be plagued by, and it's hard to fathom how they can justify their lifestyle.'

'What's funny is that even smokers say they prefer to sleep in non-smoking rooms, which is all they will find at FreshStay properties. So you can say that, along with providing socially responsible travel options, we're actually saving people time, money, and hopefully even a few lives by not allowing smoking.'

'Maybe that's overselling ourselves a bit, but that's how seriously we and our member hotels take what we do.'

A Part of the Community

The Radisson Plaza Hotel & Suites in Kalamazoo, Mich., prides itself on being a trend leader for its community. Locally owned and operated, the 341-room Radisson is a Four-Diamond AAA-rated property, complete with full-service day spa and salon, three retail shops and onsite florist in the heart of downtown Kalamazoo.

The hotel's highest priority is the genuine care and comfort of its guests, and that starts with a 100-percent smoke-free property and being listed on FreshStay.com.

'We really went smoke-free in January 2008 because we were concerned about the health of our employees and to promote a healthy environment for our guests,' says Meghan R. Malley, Market Analyst, Radisson Plaza Hotel & Suites. 'We're very active in our neighborhoods and wanted to step up as a healthy pinnacle for the community. We've started a smoking cessation program for our workers. And our full-service health club is open to the community (and complimentary for guests.)'

Malley says the hotel initially thought there could be some backlash from going smoke-free, particularly among the convention crowds, but that never really happened. By communicating with the convention groups and trade shows, they were able to explain the benefits of going smoke-free, and the situation was handled positively on both ends.

'We really try to be forward thinking and a positive role model in our community,' Malley says. 'Our hotel has earned the Green Lodging Michigan Steward Certification from the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth. We want to keep our employees, our guests, our hotel, our community and our environment all in good shape.'

New Recruits

Two of the newest FreshStay.com members are the Country Inn & Suites - Tampa East and the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine, Texas.

In fact, the Country Inn & Suites just opened its doors for business on February 10, 2009. With 83 guest rooms and suites equipped with high-definition LCD TVs, a business center, fitness center and other amenities, the hotel is proud to offer 100% Non Smoking accommodation, and has made the policy a huge part of who they are.

'The majority of guests request a non-smoking hotel environment. The only way to provide this experience is to not allow smoking within the building,' says the Country Inn & Suites' Kenny Dhana. 'The policy is integrated in our comprehensive employee training process. All associates have been trained to respond to potential violations of the policy. For example, housekeepers are trained to observe signs of smoking in the hotel. Guests are reminded at the time of booking and upon arrival at the hotel that smoking is not permitted inside the building.'

At the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center, a huge part of what they do is cater to the business and conference crowd. The 393-room facility is a member of IACC International Association of Conference Centers.

'We believe that more and more people are requesting smoke free environments and as we were already virtually smoke free, the full conversion made sense," says Kevin Buck, Assistant Executive Manager and Director of Room Operations. "It is important that we send a message to our guests that we care about their health and well-being."

'One great benefit to our conversion is the ability to welcome group business that may not have considered our hotel before. Thus far we have received an extremely positive response from all guests,' Buck adds.

Both properties not only found huge benefits to going smoke-free, but also to partnering with FreshStay.com.

'Our policy is simply providing our guests with a fresh, cozy, and 'feels just like home' stay that our guests love every time they visit us,' says the Country Inn & Suites' Dhana. 'FreshStay.com was the only website I found that was actively promoting the Freshest, Cleanest, 100% Smoke Free Hotels to the guest looking for accommodations. I have always been committed to a non-smoking environment for the health benefit of our guests and employees and pledge to improve the quality of our services, environment, and get the Florida State hotel green certification in near future.'

Hilton DFW Lakes' Buck agrees, and sees more hotels following suit in the future.

'I think in the near future you will see all hotels becoming 100% Smoke Free,' he says. 'It is just a sign of our 'greener' times. FreshStay.com is a great partner because we share the same ideals. They are also a big help in conveying our message to others.'

About Pineapple Hospitality

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