



Hotels Charging Up Green Initiatives

Automobile charging stations are starting to make an impact at hotels. Here's why it's time to start caring.

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Hotels are going "green" and one of the more unique ways is by installing electric vehicle charging stations. As we all know concern for the environment is a way for hotels to stand out in a crowded marketplace, meet client needs and expectations, and "do the right thing" for the planet. And charging stations can make a statement and drive business to a property that is way beyond the customer's current expectations.

"They're not just an amenity," says Alex Attia, general manager of The Charles Hotel in Cambridge, Mass., a Preferred Hotel. "It's what the customer is looking for. It's convenient for them and gives them another reason to come to our hotel rather than go to another one."

When Attia first heard about charging stations for hybrid and electric vehicles, he decided to act, and that was in 2009.

Staying ahead of new and emerging trends is important in the hospitality business. "It keeps us fresh," says Attia. "Nobody can say we're out-of-date. We're up-to-date. We want to be ahead of the game if we can be."

One hotel group that is leading the charge is the San Francisco-based Kimpton Hotel and Restaurant Group, which has more than 58 hotels and restaurants in the U.S. Eleven Kimpton properties already have installed charging stations and a total of seven Kimpton hotels features free parking for hybrid cars. In addition, 32 properties offer parking discounts for hybrid cars.

"We think today's traveler is more aware and committed to responsible travel, feeling a personal responsibility to lessen their carbon footprint," says Steve Pinetti, senior vice president, inspiration & creativity for Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants. "As hybrid and electric vehicles become more affordable and practical, we see them moving away from being trendy to becoming a mainstay in the years ahead."

Founder Bill Kimpton aimed to bring responsible business practices and sustainable initiatives to every aspect of the hotel business, beginning in 1981, and continuing to grow and expand such programs since then.

Based on research, Kimpton's goal was a gradual "phase-in" approach to determine what works for certain hotels but might not work for others. Guest feedback is a part of this, Pinetti says.

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts has had its Green Partnership Program since 1990, a comprehensive approach to reducing its impact on the environment with a focus on energy and water conservation, waste management, and community outreach programs. For example, the Fairmont Pacific Rim, a 377-room luxury property that opened in 2010 in Vancouver, British Columbia, installed a electric vehicle charging station in October. It's free for guests to use. "It's not a marketing tool," says Samatha Geer, a spokeswoman for Fairmont Pacific Rim.. "It's about doing the right thing."

At the Auberge Resorts in northern California, charging stations are a way to meet guests' expectations, says Caroline MacDonald, senior vice president of marketing, Auberge Resorts. "It's what the guests are asking for," she says. Early in 2011, Auberge Resorts surveyed guests to find out if they owned a hybrid or electric vehicle, if they were considering purchasing one. "More had them than we thought," she says. "Twenty

percent said they were considering it for their next purchase.” Auberge Resorts has electric charging stations at its Calistoga Ranch and Solage Calistoga properties and intends to install stations at its Palmetto Bluff and Auberge du Soleil locations in 2013.

For Auberge Resorts, it’s a way to attract travelers to the properties. “It’s more of a great amenity,” says MacDonald. “It’s like, ‘I want Red Bull in my refrigerator all the time,’” she says. “It differentiates the brand. We want our consumers to come to us because we’ve met a lot of their needs. I think it does add value and we don’t charge for it. It’s what we see guests want. It’s a trend we’re seeing. I think it will catch on. You don’t want them to go to your neighbor. It’s a point of distinction that will become not the exception,” says MacDonald. The cost was under \$10,000 for one charging station.

The Verdanza Hotel, a member of the Summit Hotel group located in the Isla Verde section of Puerto Rico, installed an electric vehicle charging station in 2011.

“It’s part of a whole environmental program,” says Rick Newman, president of the Verdanza. Other aspects of the energy saving program are the use of LED (light-emitting diode) bulbs as opposed to incandescent or fluorescent.

Newman believes the charging station has worked well for the Verdanza, even though electric cars are still few and far between in Puerto Rico. “Eventually there will be cars that need charging and we’ll be ready,” he says. Meanwhile, it brought a lot of attention to the property. “It differentiates the property and makes a statement to the public that we are for getting high fuel and polluting vehicles off the road. “There wouldn’t be a market until we had a charging station,” he says.

Luxury properties are among those hotels interested in differentiating themselves to attract business. For example, the Fontainebleau Miami Beach and CarCharging Group, headquartered in Miami Beach have announced the installation of an electric vehicle charging service on the 22-acre oceanfront resort. “Fontainebleau has seen a growing number of customers utilizing EVs at our facility, and we want to provide guests, residents, and visitors with the ability to re-charge while visiting the resort,” says Phil Goldfarb, president and COO, Fontainebleau Miami Beach.

The InterContinental Vienna is taking the trend a step further. It has electric cars for hotel guests and local area residents to rent for a slightly higher price than gas-driven automobiles. The hotel also has a complimentary charging station.

Loews Vanderbilt Hotel in Nashville has EV charging stations in the hotel parking garage, and has a Go Green, Save green package that include complimentary overnight valet parking and overnight charge for electric vehicles.

The Grand Traverse Resort and Spa near Traverse City, Mich., also has installed an EV charging station, which can charge up to four vehicles at the same time with 120-volt and 240-volt capacity. It is one of number of initiatives that has earned state-wide recognition for the property.

Under the U.S. Green Business Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program, new construction including hotels can earn up to three points toward LEED certification for installing one or more EV charging stations or for preferred discounted parking for low-emitting vehicles and fuel-efficient vehicles under certain circumstances. In the LEED program for existing building system, a project can earn up to 15 points for installing EV charging stations depending on how much they contribute to reducing compared to conventional vehicles.

LEED certification requires 40 to 49 points; silver certification requires 50 to 59 points; gold certification, 60 to 79 points, and platinum, 80 or more points.