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## Nordic hotel chain cuts carbon footprint by a third

Sean Dodson finds out how one of the Nordic region's biggest hotel chains has reduced its guests' carbon footprint by a third, and wonders if others will follow suit

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**Sean Dodson**

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**Green chain ... Scandic are phasing out bottled water and filling jugs from the tap instead. Photograph: Corbis**

The majority of "eco" hotels are to be found in far away places, where they are aided in their search for a reduced carbon footprint by a benevolent climate. You'll struggle to find many in city centres, say, or in the energy-draining north with its long, freezing winter nights.

Or so you might think. Because one of the biggest hotel chains in the Nordic region has just announced that it has reduced the carbon footprint of its guests by a third.

According to Jan Peter Bergkvist director of all things green at Scandic, the group has been able to substantially reduce its carbon footprint. After a thorough audit, they found that the group's guests used 5.5kg of carbon each night, but it has reduced that figure to 3.6kg per guest night. How?

Let's start with the details, like the use of wooden pens and wooden keycards, which are both biodegradable. Then there are the recycling bins in every room. The chain has started phasing out bottled water, instead presenting guests with an empty water jug and asking them to fill it from the tap. Even the taps themselves are more efficient, using around half as much water as standard ones when you use them to wash your hands.

Naturally, the floors are wooden, which feels suitably Scandinavian, but these also help the chain make the claim that 97% of everything in its rooms can be recycled. Like most hotels, guests are encouraged to reuse their towels for more than one day. But Scandic goes further by sending its dirty linen to Scandinavia's first eco-labelled laundry. And its waste food goes to an organic recycling mill where it is converted into biogas - the first hotel chain to use such a system.

Scandic has also reduced the number of cleaning chemicals it uses from 55 down to 17, 70% of which are eco-labelled. Moreover, 70% of its hotels run entirely on hydroelectric power - the only ones that don't lie deep inside, or very near to, the Arctic Circle where they still rely on the burning of oil. "But we are working on it," says Bergkvist.

Scandic's environmental policies even extend beyond its hotels. The concierge will lend you a bike and helmet (for free) and if you do insist on taking a taxi, they will order you one that uses some form of "sustainable" power (biogas or ethanol or a hybrid) which are becoming increasingly common in the Nordic region.

Which is all very impressive, but how does Scandic compare with other hotels? The answer is that it's very difficult to tell. Other large hotel chains have yet to publish figures detailing how much carbon is consumed per guest, per night. Indeed Scandic is the first hotel group in the world to release such figures. According to Dick Sisman, founder of the Tourism Industry Carbon Offset Service many hotels have yet to even calculate how much carbon is consumed by each guest per night. "I think that most hotels do not have the expertise to calculate their carbon footprint in an accurate way," he says. "One suggestion may be for a new calculator to agreed parameters to be developed, perhaps by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) or one of the big hotel associations."

Scandic arrived at its figure - which has been independently audited - by calculating the sum total of all its heating, cooling, electricity, gas and the emissions by its fleet of cars and then dividing it by the total number of guests. The final figure does not include carbon emitted by their guests' travel to the hotel.

Other hotels are said to be thinking about making significant reductions in carbon emissions, but few have published figures of success. The Marriott hotel group back in April announced that it was on schedule to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2010.

But there is another reason why Scandic's experience might soon become commonplace, other than pure concern for the environment. "There are

cold economic reasons for going green," admits Bergkvist. "We see it as safer to be part of the solution," he says. "We don't want to be in a situation where energy costs continue to rise and waste disposal costs go up and our profits become vulnerable. Since we've implemented our programme our profits have risen."

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