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## Pacific Northwest an excellent place for green vacations

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Eco-tourism doesn't have to involve sleeping in a yurt in Mongolia.

Some of our greenest and most enjoyable vacations can be taken without leaving the Pacific Northwest.

Since more of us will take vacations closer to home this summer because of the economy, let's take a little ride and explore the concept of regional green travel.

**Q:** Should I feel guilty about the environmental impact of any vacation? Isn't it greener to just stay home?

**A:** Green guilt, a popular pastime in Seattle, is usually unproductive no matter what it's about. Vacations help keep us healthy, so don't feel bad about getting away from it all. Just take some reasonable steps to be as green as you can. Green vacations are often less expensive, so that's another good reason to make your vacation eco-friendly.

**Q:** For Northwest travel, which mode of transportation has the least environmental impact?

**A:** The Union of Concerned Scientists recently compared travel methods based on their generation of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas contributing to global warming. The most surprising finding was that for a trip of 100 to 500 miles for a family of four, driving a car or even an SUV is greener than taking a train. For that length of trip for four people, buses are the greenest, followed in order by cars, SUVs, trains and airplanes.

However, for two people for the same length trip, trains jumped to second in greenness, just behind buses. And for a two-person, 500-mile trip, an SUV ranks even worse than flying. The full rankings, plus a bus load of green travel tips, are at [www.ucsusa.org/gettingtheregreener](http://www.ucsusa.org/gettingtheregreener).

**Q:** More hotels and resorts in the Northwest are touting their green credentials. Is there a green-hotel-evaluation system?

**A:** The nonprofit Green Seal program ([www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)) provides the only comprehensive standards for green hotels. Categories include energy and water conservation and waste reduction.

In the Northwest, two hotels in Washington (Great Wolf Lodge in Centralia and the Hilton in Vancouver) and five hotels in Portland have attained Green Seal certification.

The "Green" Hotels Association ([www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com)) has more than 20 member hotels and resorts in Washington and Oregon. Presumably these hotels have a strong interest in green practices, but this association has no requirements for membership.

**Q:** What can I do to reduce the impact of a hotel stay?

**A:** Few of us change sheets and towels at home every day, so why do we need to have that done at a hotel? Talk to the front-desk staff or the maid, or just put the "do not disturb" sign on the door. Don't forget to turn down the air conditioning when you leave your room.

Bring a reusable water bottle to save money on buying water. Many hotel rooms have mini-refrigerators where you can keep your

water cold or store bulk food for snacks.

**Q:** How about camping?

**A:** Camping is about as green and cheap as a vacation gets. If you enjoy sleeping under the stars, you live in the right place. From ocean beaches to rain forests to mountains to the desert, the Northwest offers some of the finest camping in the world.

To reduce consumption and save money, consider buying used camping equipment online or at local stores such as Second Ascent in Ballard, or thrift shops. Use crank flashlights to avoid buying batteries.

**Q:** So what's the greenest Northwest vacation of all?

**A:** That would probably be a volunteer camping vacation through a group such as the Washington Trails Association ([www.wta.org/volunteer](http://www.wta.org/volunteer)) or the American Hiking Society ([www.americanhiking.org/volunteerVacation.aspx](http://www.americanhiking.org/volunteerVacation.aspx)). You usually pay a small fee to participate and do valuable work restoring trails. You'll also see stunning backcountry scenery and wildlife, meet interesting people and have the satisfaction of being more than just a tourist on your vacation.

*Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services.*

*Reach him at [tom.watson@kingcounty.gov](mailto:tom.watson@kingcounty.gov), 206-296-4481 or [www.KCecoconsumer.com](http://www.KCecoconsumer.com)*

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