

# *Travel Far, read Lightly*

*A trio of corporate social responsibility practitioners explain how the travel and tourism industries have reduced their impact on the environment and how frequent flyers can do the same*

By Jennifer Khoo



**W**hether driven by a need to cut costs or to be better corporate citizens, organizations in the hospitality, travel and tourism industries are changing their behavior for the better. Many companies in these allied industries recognize that the environment, people and the communities they form are valuable resources, and that long-term sustainability in these industries requires careful consumption of those resources.

To mark the United Nations' International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, *AmChamHK* spoke to three corporate social responsibility practitioners who specialize in tourism and travel: Evelyn Chan, head of environmental affairs for Cathay Pacific Airways; Natalie Chan, Director of PIE Strategy Limited and the former global director of corporate responsibility and sustainability for Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels; and Carmen Ng, director of sustainability for Langham Hospitality Group. They told us how the travel and tourism industries are adopting sustainable practices and how individuals can travel responsibly.

## *What are the biggest challenges facing responsible travel?*

**Evelyn Chan:** The aviation industry accounts for 2 percent of all human-induced greenhouse gas emissions globally and this is set to grow, due to the increasing demand for travel, especially from rapidly developing regions. We recognize that emissions are a big concern and so helping our fellow-travelers reduce their impact on climate change is one of our top priorities and challenges.



*Evelyn Chan*

**Natalie Chan:** Sustainability improvement comes not just from policies and system improvements. It also counts on each and every staff to translate these policies and principles into actions on the ground. I'll give you an example: engineers can install energy-efficient LED lights to potentially save a lot on the hotel's energy use, but if room attendants don't have the habit of turning off lights after they clean the room, you still end up wasting energy. Employee engagement is key to creating a culture of sustainability.



*Carmen Ng*

**Carmen Ng:** Waste is our biggest challenge in the hospitality industry, despite the Hong Kong government's upcoming waste charging scheme and a greater overall focus on recycling and repurposing. For example, the mattresses and furniture used by hotels are too big to fit into a typical Hong Kong home and it isn't easy for NGOs to collect and reuse them, either.

## *What is your advice to travelers who want to ensure they are responsible tourists?*

**Evelyn Chan:** Offset the carbon emitted from your flights. You can do this via Cathay Pacific's FLY greener carbon offset program by contributing to carefully chosen and verified projects that reduce or prevent carbon dioxide emissions and provide community benefits.

Currently, these consist of a wind farm project in Taiwan which provides employment, and a clean-burning, efficient stove project in the mainland which improves the air quality. Also, look out for new projects to be added later this year.

Travelers can use cash or frequent-flyer miles, Asia Miles, to purchase their offsets. All money paid for the offsets goes directly to the running of these projects. This is a value-added service for our customers and Cathay Pacific does not obtain any financial gain.

**Natalie Chan:** One thing travelers can do is to ask questions. In hotels, ask how much energy is used in washing the linen. In restaurants, ask servers where the food comes from and how it was sourced. In spas, ask whether the products have been made with environmentally friendly materials. Guests have enormous power to change the industry. When enough guests demand sustainable practices, they will happen.

**Carmen Ng:** Start with simple steps, such as taking the unused toiletries in your room with you when checking out and using them on your next trip. Try to order food in the right portions, so no food waste is generated. Explore cities with bike-sharing programs or simply walk. Check with your concierge to ensure personal safety is not an issue.

To ensure that we walk the talk, Langham Hospitality Group has partnered with EarthCheck which offers a credible independent auditing and monitoring service, and is the leading international sustainability benchmarking and certification service for the travel and tourism industry. Fifteen of our 20 hotels are certified under the EarthCheck program.



Natalie Chan

