

Put to Good Use

Travelers and travel companies can minimize food waste. BY WENDY HELFENBAUM



As cruise lines, hotels, resorts and airports strive to decrease their environmental footprints, many focus on reducing, repurposing and minimizing food waste. Studies show hotels each create 79,000 tons of food waste annually. Airlines toss out more than a million tons of untouched food and beverages, according to the International Air Transport Association. And some estimates indicate cruise ships generate about 1.3 pounds of food waste per person per day.

Here's how travel companies and travelers can help curb food waste through sustainable solutions.

IATA estimates \$4 billion worth of food and beverages from airplanes end up incinerated or in landfills each year. To change that, some airlines sell discounted to-go meals on the last flight of the day, or encourage passengers to pre-order meals to refine inventory control.

Serving thousands of meals a day at sea with less waste requires creative thinking. Norwegian Cruise Line transforms watermelon rinds and banana peels into syrups for tasty cocktails, while Royal Caribbean International incorporates tomato cores into its salsa and uses leftover bread to make desserts. Chefs can also use surplus ingredients in garnishes, seasonings or jams.

RCI and other cruise lines weigh food platters before and after buffet meals to track consumption and prevent overproduction. Carnival Cruise Line invested in food biodigesters that break waste down into watery pulp for easier composting. On-site biodigesters are

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also used in hotels including Populus Hotel in Denver, which sends the compost to local farms.

Other chefs use methods such as dehydration, fermentation and pickling to repurpose food scraps as ingredients in new dishes, or turn used coffee grounds into liqueur or kombucha. Many hotels, such as Nekajui, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Costa Rica, forgo buffets in favor of tray-to-table service platters to deter food waste.

As travelers, we can make a difference, too. Minimize food waste by not overloading your plate at buffets, opting for family-style restaurants with shared dishes, and booking lodging with a mini-fridge to safely store your leftovers. Pack a collapsible soft cooler and reusable containers to enjoy that extra food on the go.

If you book a short-term vacation rental and have extra food at the end of your stay, look into local food banks and community organizations — like Second Helping Ocean Isle Beach in North Carolina and Vacation Donations in Florida — that accept unopened donated food.

Eat What You Take:
Cruise line buffet

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