Would you pay more to stay in a hotel that took steps to be “greener?” If you said “yes,” then a University of Arkansas researcher, Godwin-Charles Ogbeide, believes that you are not alone. His recent study, “Perceptions of Green Hotels in the 21st Century” has earned him the Resort and Commercial Recreation Association’s 2011 Excellence in Research Award. Ogbeide, an assistant professor of hospitality and hotel management, found that most consumers are inclined to stay at hotels that take steps to be environmentally sustainable. He cited three categories that matter most to consumers: water, energy and waste reduction. “The things that appealed to the consumers that we studied were anything to do with water conservation, energy conservation and waste reduction,” Ogbeide said. “The two the customers are most willing to do are water conservation and energy conservation. They are willing to turn off the light.” The three factors that appeal most to consumers are also the biggest concerns for hotel operations. Air conditioning systems use large amounts of energy and water, and because many hotels do not know when the patrons will be checking in, they leave the units on all day. Some hotels, in an effort to curb their energy use, will leave the units off and have the consumers turn them on when they arrive, or, if they know when their guests will arrive, turn on the unit shortly before that time. Water conservation is another area where simple changes can make big differences. For patrons who stay more than one night, the simple act of re-using a towel or not having the bed linens changed every day can save large amounts of water. “In a mega-hotel that has 1,000 rooms, imagine if just 10 percent of the guests said ‘No, I’ll reuse my towel.’ That’s 100 rooms. The hotels are saving not only the water and energy but also the waste,” Ogbeide said. Due to the interest from customers, many hotels are promoting themselves as environmentally sustainable. One method they use is placing small signs in the room, which not only tell the guests that the hotel is “green,” but also what to do if they don’t want their towels and linens changed. Currently, these things are optional, but Ogbeide envisions hotels eventually having separate areas for those who wish to have the sustainable measures and those who do not. “A good example right now is we have smoking rooms and non-smoking rooms in some hotels. As time goes on, hotels may have ‘green’ rooms and ‘non-green’ rooms,” he said. The perception that it’s expensive to “go green” can be mistaken. Some changes, such as installing windows, proper window and door seals, and more efficient building materials can be costly and require resources that only large hotel chains like Marriot and Hilton possess, but for small hotels, simple changes will actually save money. The simplest things, like turning the lights and air conditioning unit off when no one is in the room, will save money. Some hotels even have inspectors who go in the room after it has been cleaned, and turn the cooling system off. “For those that are doing it, the advantages of going green cannot be over-emphasized,” Ogbeide said. By charging the same amount per room as non-sustainable hotels, “going green” not only saves the hotels money, it helps increase their profit margin. “The idea is from the business side: If they decide to change the building, such as putting in a window which would cost money, they might increase their costs to consumers. What if they didn’t do that? What if they take the baby steps?” he said. Whatever steps they take, it is clear that consumers appreciate hotels that are environmentally responsible. “Reading between the lines, most of the consumers, you can tell, are environmentally cautious. It’s intrinsic motivation,” Ogbeide said. “They want the future generations of children to have a good environment to live in.”

Ogbeide's study has been accepted for publication in an upcoming issue of Journal of Tourism Insights.

http://www.newswise.com/articles/going-green-saves-the-green-in-the-hospitality-industry-and-guests-like-it