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PHOTO: FINNAIR

Cleaner and Greener

While hotels and resorts worldwide have gained attention for greening up their acts, segments of the airline industry have also been working steadily, if quietly, at the far more difficult problems they face in pursuit of sustainability. And not without success.

Finnair, long a leader in sustainability, this summer completed the longest commercial biofuel flight flown anywhere in the world. The flight, by Airbus A319 from Amsterdam (AMS) to Helsinki (HEL), used a 50/50 blend of ordinary aviation fuel and fuel made from renewable organic raw materials. The plants used in biofuel production absorb carbon dioxide, which is released back into the atmosphere when the biofuel combusts. The fuel used in the flight, which was the first of several, was developed in partnership with SkyNRG, a Dutch company dedicated to developing a sustainable production chain for alternative aviation fuels. Finnair executives believe that the adoption of “green routes” by airlines will help accelerate development of sustainable and affordable jet fuels, which have the long-term potential to reduce aviation emissions by up to 80 percent. Visit www.finnair.com.

Reducing fuel consumption, carbon emissions and community noise are the focus as Boeing and American Airlines partner to launch the ecoDemonstrator Program. A Boeing Next-Generation 737-800 aircraft will flight-test the emerging technologies to “boost aviation’s role as the most efficient means of global transportation,” according to Billy Glover, Boeing’s vice president. “There’s a better way to prepare advanced technologies for market entry than flying them.”

The American Airlines 737-800 will be a flight-test aircraft for the FAA’s Continuous Lower Energy Emissions Noise program. Technologies to be flown in 2012 include those that reduce noise and emissions throughout a flight and regenerative fuel cells for onboard power that reduce weight, fuel burn and CO2 emissions. Visit www.aa.com.

Rail Revival

The Greenbrier resort hotel in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., will revive the American luxury train experience with the Greenbrier Presidential Express in July 2012. Greenbrier guests will board at Washington, D.C.’s Union Station for a six-hour trip in 15 cars originally built in the 1950s for the Union Pacific and Santa Fe railroads. Completely refurbished with the finest woods and fabrics to recall the grand era of train travel, the Greenbrier Presidential Express features a boardroom car, salon car and an open-air car for admiring and photographing the mountain scenery. Visit www.greenbrier.com.

A Win for Passenger Privacy

Privacy advocates are hailing the TSA announcement that body scanners at U.S. airports will no longer create person-specific images. These will instead use software showing a generic body outline, which the passenger will be able to view at the same time as officers. Installation of the new software will begin immediately, and all new scanners will be equipped with this technology.