

it's ~~not~~ easy



ADVENTURE

Melissa Findley

An aerial photograph of a tropical resort nestled deep within a dense, lush green jungle. The resort features several buildings with traditional thatched roofs, scattered among the trees. A prominent circular structure with a thatched roof is visible in the upper center. The surrounding forest is thick with various types of trees, including many palm trees. The overall scene conveys a sense of being immersed in nature.

being green

—These environmentally conscious resorts ensure you will reconnect with nature (and yourself) and preserve the places you love to visit—

WORDS ALISON BONE / ALEXANDRA CARLTON / BILL FINK / UTE JUNKER / SARAH REID



BALI

Sarinbuana Eco Lodge

Journeying to a beautiful mountain hideaway in a remote rainforest in Bali evokes more than a sense of oneness with nature – it plants the seeds of change.

> Mount Batukaru, an extinct volcano, looms ever closer as I follow the road up its verdant, fertile slopes, passing villages, coffee plantations and banana groves. Black eagles streak across the sky and kingfishers play in the forest canopy. I am starting to enjoy this liberating feeling of being on a motorbike, the wind whipping through my hair as I catch my first glimpse of the tiled-roof bungalows peeping out from the steep valley walls blanketed in a rainforest.

The coast of southern Bali, 700 metres below, is still visible but Sarinbuana Eco Lodge (bali ecolodge.com) is a world away from the island's bustling beach scene.

Originally a self-sustaining family getaway for antipodeans Norm and Linda van Hoff, the

peaceful eco retreat has been open to paying guests since 2000. The pioneering lodge, winner of Wild Asia's Responsible Tourism Award in 2007 and 2010, has six secluded bungalows built with local bamboo, coconut and jackfruit timber.

After checking into my two-storey tree house – a rustic-chic hideaway adorned with colourful woven textiles, hand-carved furniture and billowing mosquito nets – I join the complimentary garden tour. Over 10,000 native fruit trees have been planted in the surrounding forest, while flourishing permaculture gardens brim with 150-plus species of edible plants.

Thriving vegetable patches nestle among groves of salak (snake fruit), cacao trees,

dangling passionfruit vines and fiddlehead ferns – the juicy tips of which appear in my delicious salad mixed with fresh shredded coconut and chilli, served in the cosy lodge restaurant. Here, garden-to-plate dining is a given.

Everything is in balance with nature, from the sustainable building techniques and waste management to low-impact activities such as yoga, hiking and swimming. But for Norm and Linda, who also offer ecotourism design and consultancy services, running an eco lodge means connecting with the community, above all. The staff members are all local and their community projects include a collaboration with Seacology to protect an 800-metre swathe of the adjoining rainforest – which guests can explore on guided hikes.

Authentic cultural workshops at the lodge include Balinese cooking, calligraphy, woodcarving and table decorating. It is tempting to spend all day lounging by the natural pool – those views! – but I tear myself away for a fun, laughter-filled afternoon with local villager Jero. We chat about village life and traditions while I learn to weave flowers and leaves into pretty ornaments.

Later, I join Linda on the terrace of the restaurant for a rich, smooth Balinese coffee to learn more about her eco lifestyle. "To be connected to the environment, the people and the land is my greatest joy," she says.

Experiencing what Linda and Norm have carefully created here in the remote rainforests of Bali leaves me feeling deeply inspired. When I head back down the mountain a few days later, I vow to make changes to my lifestyle – starting with learning more about permaculture so I can turn my garden into an edible one.

Alison Bone



FIJI

Maqai Beach Eco Surf Resort

> Protecting the magnificent coral reefs that surround Qamea Island is a priority for this sustainable tourism award winner. The tiny eco resort has just nine beachfront bures (bungalows), all of which run on solar power, and its white-sand beach lures surfers, divers and snorkellers to its crystal-clear water. Guests can join the friendly Fijian team in conservation projects such as coral gardening in the marine park, and the resort's close ties to the local village ensure visitors have an immersive and authentic Fijian experience.

maqai.com

HAWAII

Turtle Bay Resort

> Located on an 800-acre property far from the crowds of Waikiki, beachfront Turtle Bay might look like your standard luxury high-rise resort but it has very green roots. A local leader in solar power and low energy usage, waste reduction, composting and biodiesel conversion, the hotel won the Hawaiian Green Business Award in 2015. Excess food (all locally sourced and organic) is donated to food banks, while the resort participates in the Waste to Waves trash-to-surfboard recycling program. On the second Saturday of each month, join their beach conservation group to help with clean-ups and restoring native flora. But there is plenty more to do – from snorkelling with turtles to hiking, biking and horseriding.

turtlebayresort.com



BAMBU INDAH

BALI

Bambu Indah

> Choose to stay in an exquisitely furnished, repurposed Javanese bridal home or in a bamboo tree house at this pioneering eco retreat on the outskirts of Ubud. Here, the natural swimming pool is spring-fed and many of the meals are served on banana-leaf plates in line with its no-plastics policy. Bambu Indah belongs to a group that includes Bamboo U, which offers courses in sustainable architecture, and the sustainability-focused Green School, which you can tour while staying here.

bambuindah.com

THAILAND

Bangkok Tree House

> Nestled on a lush island on the Chao Phraya River, this quirky hotel offers the ultimate escape from the bustle of Bangkok. Easily reached by boat from the city, its rooms include an open-air platform raised seven metres above the mangrove palms. Solar power and homegrown vegetables add to Bangkok Tree House's carbon-neutral status. Bicycles are available for exploring the jungle and the team removes one kilogram of rubbish from the river for every booking.

bangkoktreehouse.com



BANGKOK TREE HOUSE

DAINTREE ECOLOGDE



QUEENSLAND

Daintree Ec Lodge

> Getting back to nature takes on new meaning at this low-impact boutique retreat tucked within the world's oldest tropical rainforest. Take a walk to a tranquil waterfall, spot musky rat-kangaroos from the private verandah of your bayan (rainforest room) or board a crocodile-spotting cruise on the nearby Daintree River. The lodge has done the legwork to ensure your stay is as sustainable as possible – right down to the nose-to-tail philosophy of the kitchen and the wild-harvested ingredients in the Li'Tya products used at the spa. Among its sustainable initiatives is a program that assists Indigenous Australians in finding stable careers, and projects that preserve the Great Barrier Reef.

daintree-ecolodge.com.au



VIETNAM

Six Senses Con Dao

> The Six Senses hotel group is renowned for its wide-ranging sustainability initiatives, and its first Vietnamese outpost, hugging a picturesque beach in the idyllic Con Dao islands, is no exception. All 50 luxurious villas have ocean views and natural ventilation to reduce the need for air-conditioning. Drinking water is bottled onsite, solar panels heat the resort's water and recycling is a top priority, with kitchen bio-waste used to compost the premises' organic garden that supplies fresh produce to its restaurants. The resort supports the local community with outreach programs and helps local wildlife through conservation initiatives – joining turtle hatchling releases is just one of the many guest activities on offer.

sixsenses.com

CAMBODIA

Phum Baitang

> Its name means "green village", which is apt for this elegant eco-conscious resort set within eight hectares of tropical gardens and rice paddies, just west of Siem Reap. Inspired by Khmer family homes, 45 beautifully furnished stilted wooden villas blend effortlessly into the rural setting. The onsite Spa Temple uses natural techniques and products and exploring the area – the gateway to Angkor Wat – by bicycle is strongly encouraged. Plus, they have a water treatment facility for purifying drinking water and growing rice.

zannierhotels.com

GREAT BARRIER REEF

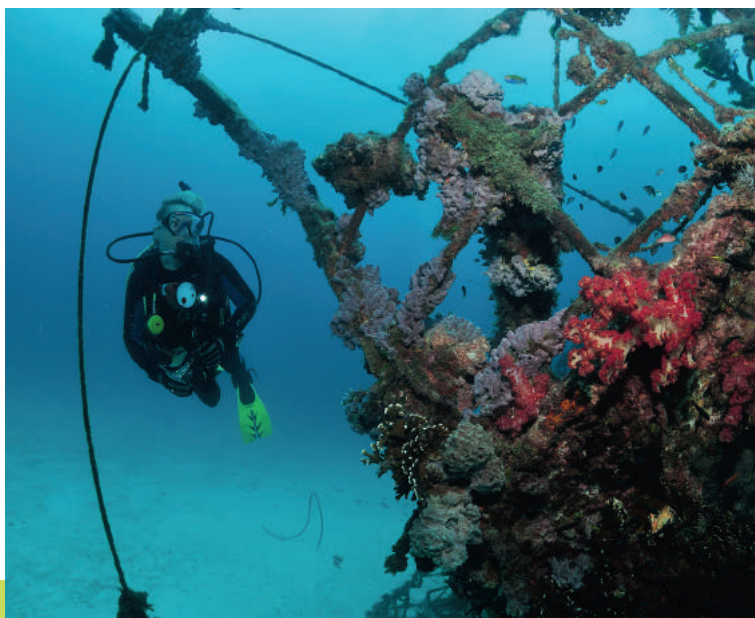
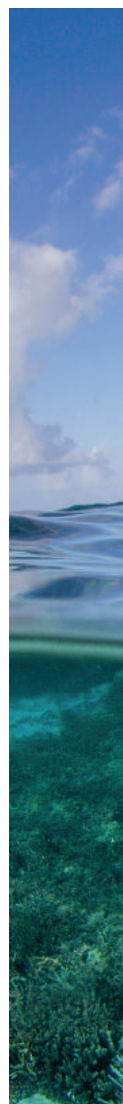
Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort

Experience the splendour of the Great Barrier Reef at its most pristine. Here, the only footprint you will leave on this tiny island will be on the beach.

> One of the first things I notice as I step expectantly from the plane onto Lady Elliot Island, a small speck at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef, is that there is not much to notice at all. When it comes to man-made structures, the 42-hectare island, 85 kilometres north-east of Bundaberg, has little more than a runway and several low-lying buildings used for dining, hiring diving gear and administration. A 19th-century lighthouse sits not far from the main settlement, and a cluster of cabins and tents allow up to 150 guests to stay overnight at Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort (ladyelliott.com.au).

Otherwise, the island belongs to its natural inhabitants – the thousands of birds, including noddies, terns and sandpipers, which live there permanently or migrate annually, and the green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles that use the island's sandy shores to lay their eggs.

Lady Elliot Island's eco-credentials go much further than its eponymous resort sitting lightly on the land, however. The retreat gets almost





all energy from solar, and up to 250 kilograms of waste is composted daily or returned to the mainland for recycling. Since 2018, custodians Peter Gash and his family have sought to restore the island's vegetation to its native state. They have removed invasive species such as lantana and replaced them with essential nesting trees for birds and coral cay natives including casuarinas and octopus bush.

The world beneath the waves around the island is also vigilantly conserved. Lady Elliot sits within a "green zone", which means fishing is banned and the reef's 1200 marine species – including manta rays, turtles, sharks and tropical fish – are protected. In addition, resort staff participate in several reef monitoring and coral health and wildlife projects, including Project Manta, which aims to track the local

manta ray population that swells in size around the island each winter.

While I don't encounter manta rays on my visit, I only need to wade a couple of metres into the coral lagoon that sits just off the sand, right outside my tent door, to come face to face with gentle turtles bobbing through the water, sleek eagle rays and comically fierce little reef fish guarding their personal patches of coral.

Starting my mornings this way helps adjust to the island's unhurried pace. Meals are relaxed and communal, and afternoons are spent snorkelling to the outer reefs.

There wasn't much to notice when I first arrived at Lady Elliot Island but there is an infinite amount to see, experience and wonder at when I slow down and truly look.

Alexandra Carlton

WHITSUNDAYS

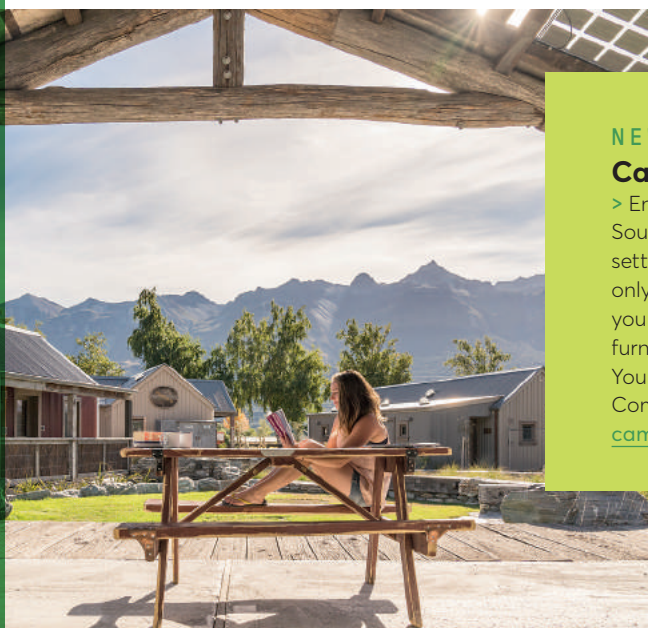
Elysian Retreat

> Will you start the day with a dip in the magnesium-enriched pool or with some waterfront yoga? At this, the first Great Barrier Reef resort powered entirely by solar energy, it is all about relaxation, whether it is watching dolphins gambolling from a hammock or indulging in an Ayurvedic spa treatment. The intimate resort – guests are limited to 20 at a time – focuses on sustainability measures including waste reduction, a ban on chemicals and advanced wastewater treatment.

elysianretreat.com.au



ELYSIAN RETREAT



CAMP GLENORCHY ECO RETREAT

NEW ZEALAND

Camp Glenorchy Eco Retreat

> Encircled by the snow-capped peaks of New Zealand's Southern Alps, the lakeside village of Glenorchy is a fitting setting for the nation's most low-impact sleep. The camp uses only as much energy as it creates via its solar garden and you can take your pick of houses, cabins and cosy bunkrooms furnished with original artworks and eco-friendly amenities. You will sleep soundly knowing profits go to the Glenorchy Community Trust to support local livability initiatives.

campglenorchy.co.nz

THALA BEACH NATURE RESERVE



QUEENSLAND

Thala Beach Nature Reserve

> This tropical haven, near Port Douglas, celebrates nature with stylish, sustainably built wooden stilt houses, discreetly tucked between heritage rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Its low-impact design, eco practices and extensive reforestation program earned it Ecotourism Australia's Green Travel Leader status in 2017. Wildlife encounters are a highlight at this 145-acre beachfront reserve, with onsite rangers guiding nature tours to see wallabies, echidnas and sugar gliders. Other activities include walks through the organic coconut plantation, a birdwatching tour, stargazing at the observatory and snorkelling or diving the world's largest coral reef.

thalabeach.com.au