



Staying Green

ASIA'S LEADING BOUTIQUE HOTELS AND HIGH-END RESORTS HAVE EMBRACED ENVIRONMENTALISM, WRITES CYNTHIA ROSENFELD

Hotels across Asia have, for many years, placed notices in rooms prompting guests to forego clean sheets and towels every day. That initiative, for many years, seemed to be their token effort to go green. How things have changed. Today, the continent's swankiest hoteliers have adopted sound eco-credentials. And governments, especially those of nations heavily reliant on tourism, are actively encouraging the trend. ¶ "The future of tourism is green," notes President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives. It shouldn't come as a surprise – his nation has 1,190 coral islands. "People will always want their luxuries and creature comforts but, I think, increasingly they also want to holiday in places that respect and look after nature rather than destroy it." ¶ With this attitude in mind, there are now countless Asian properties that have adopted best practice environmental management. Go green at these excellent boutique properties and holiday guilt-free.

SIX SENSES LAAMU

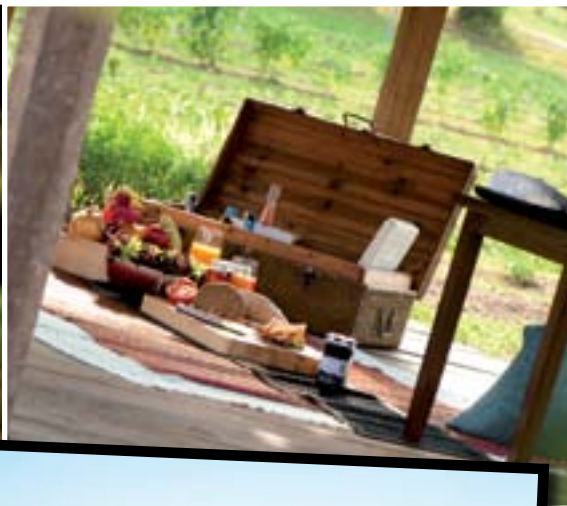
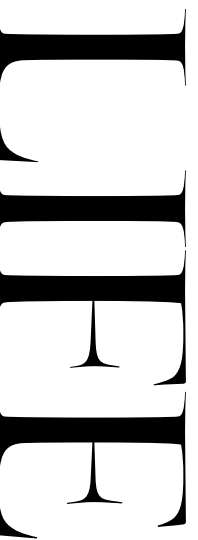
Hang ten with supermodel Helena Christensen, artist Damien Hirst and actor Ed Norton at the first ever Water/wo/men event, which will be held from September 30 to October 4 at Six Senses' latest Maldivian outpost.

The weeklong gathering for 100 or so paying guests – as well as celebrities, environmentalists and blue-water stars like pro-surfer Laird Hamilton and windsurfing champion Robbie Nash – calls attention to marine conservation, and the location is important: as sea levels rise, the fate of the Maldives and its 400,000 inhabitants could foretell the future of coastlines around the globe.

The Water/wo/men event will also encourage the innovative exchange of ideas among the

NATURE'S WONDERS CLOCKWISE

FROM TOP
The Banjaran
Hot Springs
Retreat, Malaysia;
Six Senses
Laamu's over-
water villas,
the Maldives; Alila
Villas Soori, Bali



Guests can purchase carbon credits as easily as ordering room service

world's leading conservationists, including ocean explorer Fabien Cousteau, blue-blood adventurer David de Rothschild and Sylvia Earle, former chief scientist for the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Before and long after Water/women attendees like Orlando Bloom and Golden Globe winning filmmaker Shekhar Kapur pack up their surfboards, Laamu remains committed to its parent group Six Senses' global environmental programme. The latest energy efficient LED lighting is fitted, and no rainforest timber was used in constructing the 97 rustic but chic beach and over-water villas, which also feature plush beds, outdoor rain showers and bicycles for exploring the jungle-covered isle. The Chill Bar boasts alluring waterfront hammocks and the Maldives' only resident mixologist, who blends fresh fruits and herbs from the resort's organic garden in cocktails like the Rosemary Smoked Red Snapper.

DON'T MISS: Breakfast at Longitude for dolphin spotting over homemade bread and exotic fruit jam. www.sixsenses.com/sixsenseslaamu

ALILA VILLAS SOORI

To maintain stringently high standards in water conservation, reducing energy consumption and preservation of the natural environment, Alila Hotels employs a dedicated environmental officer who oversees every aspect of properties in the Singapore-based group's stable, including Alila Villas Soori on the southwest coast of Bali. "It is part of the DNA of Alila Hotels to be environmentally sensitive," says CEO Mark Edleson.

Singaporean architect Chan Soo Khian achieved hotel industry watchdog EC3 Global EarthCheck's "Best Building, Planning and Design" certification for Alila Villas Soori's 48 beachfront accommodations. Chan locally sourced Paras Kelating (a type of sandstone) and the volcanic batu candi lava stone, minimised CO₂ levels by designing cross ventilation in all rooms, and incorporated roof insulation in his design. Electric buggies whisk guests between villas and the atmospheric Spa Alila.

DON'T MISS: Watching local kids' jaws drop as you whiz through villages on Alila's Segways. www.alilahotels.com/soori

URBN SHANGHAI

Shanghai's Nanjing Road screams conspicuous consumption. Just a few steps away, a 1970s

post office-turned-hotel offers hope for a green revolution in China. Urbn Shanghai is an entirely carbon neutral property – a first for the city and the nation, which is the planet's fastest growing emitter of greenhouse gases.

The boutique hotel offsets energy use – right down to staff commutes and food deliveries – by investing in United Nations-monitored emission-reduction programmes. Guests can purchase carbon credits as easily as ordering room service inside 26 functional and neutral-hued guestrooms featuring recycled mahogany floors covered in hemp rugs. Vintage suitcases have been recycled as artwork decorating a lobby wall made from grey bricks rescued from demolished buildings.

DON'T MISS: The all-recycled interior of the Downstairs with David Laris restaurant, named for the Australian-born but Shanghai-based celebrity chef. The eatery serves 80 per cent organic and farm-fresh cuisine. www.urbnhotels.com

THANYAMUNDRRA ORGANIC RESORT

Nestled among palm trees below the karst limestone hills of Khao Sok National Park just two hours north of Phuket, this nine-room private home turned organic retreat nestles alongside a 12-hectare farm. It is the only farm in southern Thailand approved by the International Organic Accreditation Service. Guestrooms are decorated with Thai silk furnishings and antiques. The resort's butlers were trained at some of Phuket's finest resorts, and the spa looks out over one of the planet's oldest rainforests.



HOME COMFORTS CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

Leaf restaurant at Six Senses Laamu; surf's up at Laamu; Cotta restaurant at Alila Villas Soori; organic picnic spreads from Thanyamundra, Thailand; the nine-room retreat; cooking classes at Thanyamundra
OPPOSITE PAGE
FROM TOP Urbn Shanghai's garden courtyard; Urbn studio lounge



Outdoor areas are lit by solar power and staff ride bicycles to reduce fuel consumption

HEAVENLY HOST

CLOCKWISE

FROM TOP LEFT

The Water Villa at Song Saa, Cambodia; main lodge at the Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat, Malaysia; soaring ceilings feature heavily in Song Saa's interiors; seaside villas at Song Saa

Charismatic gardener Pierre Larigaldie oversees the morning farm tour, during which you can reach down and grab handfuls of arugula as the loquacious Frenchman points to rows of aromatic Thai and Italian basil, dill, coriander and chillies running parallel to white and purple aubergine, red snake beans, winged peas, bitter melon and morning glory. Avocado, papaya, passion fruit, mango and a variety of banana plants grow nearby. The resort's show kitchen is the place for a relaxed Thai cooking class over a glass of biodynamic wine.

DON'T MISS: A guided jungle trek in search of lar gibbons, long-tailed macaques, Malay sun bears, tapirs, monitor lizards and the endangered clouded leopard. www.thanyamundra.com

THE BANJARAN HOTSPRINGS RETREAT

Fifteen minutes outside the Malaysian city of Ipoh and a two-hour drive from Kuala Lumpur, this under-the-radar, 25-villa holistic spa resort

takes full advantage of its perch on a jungle's edge. Instead of warming up for a traditional Malay urut massage in a steam room, head into the natural steam cave on this lushly forested property that is designed to blend with its surrounding. Then take a dip in the resort's geothermal pool. The same naturally occurring source provides water for villa Jacuzzis.

Villas take advantage of natural shade and layouts maximise ventilation so that even the most air conditioner-addicted traveller will find ceiling fans sufficiently cooling. Outdoor areas are lit by solar power and staff ride bicycles to reduce fuel consumption.

DON'T MISS: The Banjaran's bespoke spa products are 100 per cent carbon free and produced from local plants. www.thebanjaran.com

SONG SAA PRIVATE ISLAND

With 27 over-water, rainforest and beach villas,

Song Saa is the first private island getaway in Cambodia. This sexy haven is located on the Koh Rong archipelago off the country's southwest coast, and its mission is to revive the surrounding marine ecosystem that has been damaged by decades of neglect, dynamite fishing and excessive harvesting. The owners have established a 10 million square foot marine reserve – Cambodia's first. It extends from reefs that surround the two islands of Song Saa. This no-take zone is being managed to international standards for marine protected areas, and Song Saa's expatriate marine biologist teaches sustainable fishing methods to fishermen in the nearby villages. The initiative aims to protect underwater assets like the area's sea-grass meadows that are vital to dugong, green turtles and seahorses.

DON'T MISS: Playing castaway among the 20 deserted islands that are easily accessible via the hotel's swanky flotilla. www.songsaa.com

GOOD EARTH

FROM TOP RIGHT

An over-water villa at Song Saa; Pura Organic farm workers harvest the produce

PURA GENIUS

Southern Thailand is leading the way in ensuring that the kingdom's finest resorts feed their guests only the healthiest produce, and the company Pura Organic Foods is now delivering the goods to several high-end properties on Phuket, as well as on Koh Samui and Krabi. Working with the Thai Ministry of Commerce, Pura Organic sponsors events such as cooking competitions for the hotel industry to increase awareness of the healthy aspects of organic farming.

While the Pura Organic team scours Thailand for the best produce, many of its items are grown on Thanyamundra Organic Farm, the first such facility in southern Thailand to be certified by the Organic Agriculture Certification Thailand, which is part of the International Organic Accreditation Service.

Executive chef Anthony Reynolds of Six Senses Yao Noi calls Thanyamundra the region's "best sustainable source for organic products" because the farm produces organic compost for fertilisation of gardens. Reynolds credits the way the farm's chickens are kept for the "healthy and flavoursome" eggs that are included in Six Senses lavish breakfasts.

Pura Organic also buys unpackaged items in bulk as much as possible, recently adjusted its delivery schedule to a few days per week, and is using only biodegradable bags at its small farm shop in Phuket's Thalang district. www.puraorganic.org