

Responsible travel, healthy planet

From off-season travel to bio-positive tourism, the fight for climate change is finally getting real. Thanks to the ever-expanding tribe of planet-sensitive holiday makers making responsible choices, the rules of the game are changing rapidly. And for those serious about saving the globe, sustainability claims now run deeper than glib greenwashing.

words // Punita Malhotra

A host of innovations in engineering, architecture and design are transforming the new-age hospitality experience, intending to reconfigure the human-environment interface like never before. Bamboo straws and farm-to-fork gourmet dining, eco-shower heads and chemical-free swimming pools, low-energy LED lamps and mattresses made from natural materials; the changes are

wiping clean the old-school approach of apathy. Think water and paper recycling initiatives, diverting waste from landfill, reforestation and zero-carbon foot-printing. From exclusive homestays and boutique hotels to leading luxury resorts, eco-awareness is becoming the guiding light to a hopeful future. Say hello to fresh air, nature's music, organic food and joys of richer biodiversity.

IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

Fishing net carpets on floors, dishes prepared from foraged ingredients, organic beer, garden benches constructed from fallen trees and walls of repurposed wood are no figment of an overactive imagination. Hotels and resorts are pushing the envelope by incorporating earth-loving architectural features to create sensitive, non-invasive sanctuaries that respect ecology.



The design of Spice Village, Thekkady, aptly embodies the values of its promoter group, CGH Earth (Clean Green Healthy Earth). Cottages in the 12-acre resort, representing a

tribal community village, have thatched roofs of elephant grass woven by villagers, eliminating the need for air-conditioning. Simple pine wood furniture from wooden crates, old-school door

latches instead of electronic key cards, recycled paper notepads, herbal toiletries and glassware to replace plastic are just some of the environmentally friendly alternatives adorning the property. All ingredients including spices, vegetables, whole grain, millets and jaggery sourced from within 50 miles make up the 50-Mile Diet at Spice Village. The mantra is to keep it 'au naturale'.



Another brilliant example of an eco-friendly construction is Ecuador's Mashpi Lodge. Built with materials that counteract extreme temperatures, the property maintains comfortable temperatures constantly, reducing the need for external heating or cooling systems. This pre-assembled metal structure uses minimal cement and a laminated wood facade that subtly integrates the building with the surrounding forest cover.

HEALTHY SHOTS OF ENERGY

More and more hotels are embracing technology and progressing towards energy-efficient appliances, automatic room temperature control systems and occupancy sensors that switch to energy-saving mode when guests leave their rooms. Caravelle Saigon, a hotel in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, has elevators with high efficiency and energy-saving motors. Going a step further is Vienna's Boutiquehotel Stadthalle, the first-ever hotel to have a net-zero carbon footprint. This hotel generates electricity through solar panels, photovoltaic cells and groundwater heat pumps. An in-house Siemens-designed

building management system monitors and controls energy usage for optimum efficiency. Guests even have free access to solar-run electric vehicle charging stations. Hotel Landgut Borsig (Nauen, near Berlin) not only produces its own energy but has bought a complete nearby forest to partially neutralise its carbon footprint. As the first carbon-neutral hotel in the Caribbean, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort takes pride in owning the largest solar panel installation allowed by the government of Aruba. A plethora of energy efficient appliances, photovoltaic solar panels, water reducers and low-flow toilets are in place to ensure lowest per

occupied-room electricity usage among all hotels on the island. Taking things up several notches, the ski resort of Rocksresort in Laax, Switzerland, (already powered by hydroelectricity and renewable biomass energy) is slated to add three wind turbines as an additional energy source.

REGENERATING NATURE'S BOUNTIES

Replant species-appropriate trees, integrate agroforestry practices on existing farms and ranches, restore wetlands, regrow marshes, savannas, grasslands, steppes, and deserts...the task to reverse greenhouse gas emissions is gigantic, but passionate patrons have already flagged off the march.

Under the umbrella of the Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation Initiative, the Kahala Hotel & Resort plans to plant 200,000 Hawaiian Milo trees in Oahu, and this is just the first step in its ultimate goal of planting 1.3 million native trees throughout Hawaii. Bisate Lodge inside Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park is a champion of animal conservation as it supports over 70 mammal species, including the endangered golden monkey and mountain gorillas through a reforestation initiative.

Five hectares of protected seagrass meadows surrounding Six Senses Laamu serve as a nursery for sea life, including endangered green sea turtles. Six Senses Fiji's efforts to build a thriving underwater coral garden have been recognised universally. Similarly, Conrad Bora Bora Nui Resort in French Polynesia is regenerating 17 coral structures using a 'Biorock' technique developed by marine biologists.

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Leading the **GREEN MOVEMENT**



Denmark has been a front runner in the push towards developing renewable energy sources, as well as enforcing regulations that support the sustainability of their environment. 72 per cent of the population of the capital city of Copenhagen has begun to sort their biowaste, which further support other environmental issues by converting the waste into biogas and fertiliser alternatives.



LOVE FOR LOCAL

As nations start to pledge in favour of a carbon-free and sustainable ecosystem, environmental experts agree that investing in local communities and helping them preserve their cultural traditions is one of the most effective approaches to biodiversity. Enter fund-raising for medical facilities, creating worker-owned cooperatives, empowering locals and promoting historical, natural and cultural heritage.

A century-old royal residence of the King of Ladakh reincarnated as an eco-glamping boutique hotel, glitters like a precious gem in the backdrop of the rushing Zaskar waters, just 45-minutes drive away from the capital city of Leh. The Tibetan-style architecture at Nimmu House, using local stones, Kashmiri latticed wood and Changpa nomad carpets, blends in effortlessly with the spectacularly mountainous landscape of the Indus Valley and showcases the grandeur of

the local heritage and supports the local economy. The property includes a stable with yaks, dzos and cattle, lush terraced gardens and a 4,500-square metres fruit orchard, where local women are invited to collect fruit to make homemade jam, which is bought for the hotel's use.

Hiring 75 per cent of staff from the local area, Ecuador's Mashpi Lodge directly impacts the area's economy and ensures that guests have an even more immersive experience during their interactions. Locals make the best guides because of their authentic dialect, cultural background and familiarity with indigenous traditions and legends.

As compassionate carbon-consciousness increases and the dream of a fossil-free future further fuels the fight for climate change, sustainability will eventually get naturally interwoven into not just hotel design, but all human habitat. 🌱