



SHANGHAI, CHINA

An eco-wonderland in the middle of an urban jungle? China's first carbon-neutral hotel is a 1970s warehouse-turned-post office-turned-hotel with just 26 rooms styled around contemporary Shanghaiese theme. The four-storey hotel is design driven -- in fact, it's so chic you would never associate it with the green label. It is retrofitted with as much sustainable and recyclable materials as possible.

Admirably, owners Scott Barrack's and Jules Kwan's goal is to be "at the forefront of promoting environmental awareness, protection and sustainable buildings within the hotel industry". Old bricks from Suzhou houses and factories line the hallways; mahogany flooring from 1920s Shanghaiese houses paves the hotel; roof tiles salvaged from old Suzhou buildings decorate the bar and lobby; even the elevator is a second-hand piece. If you want to get really technical, walls are painted with non-toxic paints, a water-based air-conditioning system uses less harmful coolants and there's extensive foliage -- ivy, for instance, crawls on the south side of the hotel as part of a "green walling" initiative. Energy consumption -- including the daily commute by staff -- is diligently tracked and carbon footprints are offset through the purchase of credits in green energy developments and emission reduction projects throughout China to neutralise the footprints.

Rates from RMB\$1,400 (\$313) a night; Christmas promotion RMB\$1,888 including Christmas dinner; www.urbnhotels.com



Have a green Christmas

Travel with an eco-friendly conscience this season with Joan Koh's list of hotels that aim to be green



BAMBU INDAH

Bali, Indonesia

Denizens of the urban jungle may squirm at the thought of swimming in a pool with frogs and fish (the water's chemical-free and this pool is essentially a hole in the earth lined with recycled black rubber membrane then filled with lava stones), or sleeping to some incredibly loud songs from insects you would rather not come face to face with (there's no TV or stereo to drown the constant buzz). The environ is unspoilt: steps at the valley edge lead to Ayung River where you can bathe full monty with the locals; cross the river and you get to vast, tranquil rice fields. At turndown, staff brings you a carafe of water instead of plastic bottled water (triple filtered using reverse osmosis and colloidal silver). Toiletries and mozzie repellent (they are organic and chemical-free, too) likewise come in

glass bottles. There's an organic herb and vegetable garden and jeweller-turned-hotelier and conservationist John Hardy's gems are the four old houses he transplanted from Java, all beautifully restored and preserved. Bamboo, possibly the most sustainable natural resource on earth, is generously -- and creatively -- used everywhere. The handsome Minang House, which easily doubles as an open-concept MICE location, is constructed entirely from black bamboo. The Hardys also run the sustainably managed Green School, offering holistic education for pre-schoolers through year eight -- monetary contributions to fund scholarships, various environmental projects and a medical centre are welcome.

Rates from US\$200 a night; festive rates an additional US\$50 a night; www.bambuindah.com

LANGHAM PLACE ECO RESORT & SPA

Koh Lanta, Thailand

It's not the most accessible place: Koh Lanta is two hours by ferry from Phuket or a minimum of two hours from Krabi, depending on your mode of transportation. With relative seclusion, excellent marine life and stunning seascape are Krabi's best-kept secrets. Just dive in to remind yourself why these underwater beauties should be protected. The 185-room seaside resort, lushly landscaped and carved on a side of a hill, feels like a little self-sufficient eco-resort (the Langham Hotels group has the lofty goal of becoming the greenest hotel chain). Cooking oil here is given a new lease of life as biodiesel: five gallons of treated cooking oil from the resort's kitchens are used to power the water pumps and tuk tuk vans; the florist supervisor has cleverly substituted candles with used cooking oil to light the lamps. Solar energy powers the 10 electrical golf carts (there are plans to harness solar energy more efficiently throughout the resort) and nonhazardous cleaning materials -- soaps and detergents -- are diligently used. Recycling is big: garden waste is collected and composted, treated water from the kitchens go to the plants and plastic oil drums find new use as fishing buoys and landing pad markers for seaplanes.

Promotional rates from THB19,000 (\$828.29.) a night; www.krabi.langhamplacehotels.com



ANGSANA VELAVARU

Maldives

From May to September, the critically endangered Green Sea turtles trudge up to Angsana Velavaru to nest. The equally rare Hawksbill turtles do it all year round. Angsana's guests are invited to watch the hatching process but it's pretty much a see-no-touch activity. In other areas, you can be as hands on as you want to be. These folks are seasoned marine conservationists: sister resort Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru set up a marine lab in 2003 staffed by five full-time staff (the lab conducts sea turtle conservation and tagging and satellite tracking of sea turtles in the Maldives, among other eco-initiatives). There's reef cleaning once a month and the four thriving coral gardens planted by the resort remind you why the precious marine ecosystem should be zealously conserved. Their

efforts have paid off -- some areas are recovering from coral degradation. Angsana's green programmes aren't just under water: their goal is to plant 2,000 trees a year. For the more passive guest, there's a Green Imperative Fund (GIF) to ease your conscience: a US\$1 (\$1.53) charge is added to your bill for every room night occupied and the hotel matches your donation dollar for dollar. The GIF at Angsana Velavaru goes to fund the battery backup for desktop computers at three local schools (at the moment, GIF from all 24 Angsana and Banyan Tree hotels are diverted to the Sichuan Earthquake Fund till the end-2009).

As part of the first anniversary promotions, a one-for-one promotion is available till February 2009; rates start from US\$160 per person per night; www.angsana.com

LIGHTHOUSE HOTEL & SPA

Galle, Sri Lanka

The Jetwing group, which operates 10 hotels in Sri Lanka -- three are Small Luxury Hotels of the World -- has long been championing Sri Lanka's wildlife tourism through Jetwing Eco Holidays, the country's leading wildlife tour operator. Bird watching, primate safari and wildlife photography are all what they do regularly. The group is particularly known for its environmental sensitivity. The seaside Geoffrey Bawa-designed Lighthouse, for example, has gone all out to work closely with the local community: tuk tuk drivers in the Galle area have been trained to meet the hotel's service standards; and the hotel shop avoids stocking products that can be bought locally so it doesn't compete with local businesses. Among other green initiatives, solar heating is used in the spa (it also uses water-saving cisterns), disposal of solid and liquid wastes is studiously managed, the use of plastic has been reduced drastically (herbal toiletries are dispensed in ceramic bottles and paper straws are used for beverages) and biodegradable chemicals are used for pest control and cleaning agents. Guests are encouraged to participate in the hotel's green effort by separating degradable and non-degradable trash in the room.

Rates from US\$138 a night; festive rates from US\$549. www.jetwing.com



SHANGRI-LA RESORTS

Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia

At Shangri-La's Rasa Ria, you can spend the morning bird watching and admiring the views of Kota Kinabalu in a 64-acre nature reserve just five minutes' walk from your room. Then check out the orang utan rehabilitation centre at the foot of the hill to see how the gentle apes have been nursed back to health by dedicated rangers. Entrance fees to the nature reserve fund the orang utan rehabilitation programme. And for a small fee, you can plant a wild fruit tree in the rainforest, too. At Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru in downtown Kota Kinabalu -- considered a city hotel though wonderful landscaping lends a more idyllic impression -- paper bags are favoured over plastics, food and garden wastes are composted and five adopted schools learn DIY environmental initiatives from the hotel. This Shang has also adopted World Wide Fund For Nature, specifically to protect giant pandas in south-west China -- so donate generously to the Panda Box.

Rates for Rasa Ria are from RM570 (\$241.53); festive rates from RM950. Rates for Tanjung Aru are from RM435 a night; festive rates from RM1,140; www.shangri-la.com



SIX SENSES HIDEAWAY YAO NOI

Phuket, Thailand

Some jungle resorts look far too posh and manicured. Not the Six Senses Hideaway Yao Noi -- it flies the "rustic, intelligent luxury" flag proudly. The exuberant wilderness is part of the charm, so is the architecture -- built completely with local materials -- that invites the environs into all 56 open-concept villas, restaurants and spa. Natural insect repellent and sprays are provided (the lemongrass scent is thoughtfully worked into the body lotion), flashlights are rechargeable and a small organic menu has produce from the resort's own organic herb and vegetable garden. All Six Senses resorts have recently

stopped importing branded bottled water: they produce on-site their own still and sparkling drinking water using the Classic Crystal system. The swimming pool uses saline salt as a sanitation medium (so it's kinder to your skin while being green); air-conditioning is kept minimal (the three restaurants and bars are naturally ventilated); nine golf carts operate with rechargeable batteries; composting and fertilising of garbage are done in an in-house waste collection and handling centre.

Rates from THB23,500 a night; festive rates from THB33,100; www.sixsenses.com

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