

10 Best Luxury Eco-Resorts from Forbes Traveler

April 12, 2007



These days, everything is about going green: hybrid cars, radiant cooling in houses, carbon offsets, CESiak resorts. Right now, if you get a certain package from W hotels, they will plant 100 trees for your reservation.

If you are a die-hard or casual reader of the Suite Life, you'll know that I love Top 10 lists. I also love environmentally-friendly happenings around the country and around the world. So when I found this new Top 10 list on green travel and luxury eco-resorts, well, I just had to bring it to your attention.

The Top 10 Eco-Resorts:

Finca Rosa Blanca Country Inn, Costa Rica

Views of volcanoes, cloud forests and coffee plantations abound from this resort in the Central Valley of Costa Rica, which is at an elevation of 4,000 feet above sea level and sits on 10 acres of fruit trees and tropical flora. Guided tours to nearby national parks, cloud forests, biological rain forest reserves, and botanical gardens offer a multitude of eco-educational opportunities.

Jungle Bay Resort & Spa, Dominica

This Dominican resort, found midway down the chain of Caribbean islands near Guadeloupe and Martinique, includes 35 cottages elevated on wooden posts and perched like bird's nests under a jungle canopy. The visitor center sits on a seaside cliff. A yoga center, a volcanic stone swimming pool, live entertainment and dancing are popular diversions.

Ranveli Holiday Village, Sri Lanka

Just 11 miles from Colombo International Airport, Ranveli Holiday Village sits on a 22-acre peninsula of mangrove and freshwater rivers abutting the ocean on land that was originally a coconut plantation. Bungalows and buildings sit amongst the rows of coconut trees. The onsite Ayurveda Centre provides beauty therapies, herbal oil massage and other holistic treatments.

Centro Ecológico Sian Ka'an (CESiaK), Mexico

Built on a peninsula within Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve — a large UNESCO World Heritage Site two hours south of Cancun — CESiaK promotes ecological education via immersion in the local environment, including guided kayaking, boating through mangrove channels, birding, exploring Mayan ruins and snorkeling the Mesoamerican Reef just offshore. Beachside palapas and an onsite restaurant run by local chefs adds ambience to the paradisiacal escape.

EcoCamp Patagonia, Chile

Geodesic domes reminiscent of the local Kawesqar people's huts were constructed for guests visiting EcoCamp Patagonia, which is in Torres del Paine National Park. Trekking into the Patagonian wonderland of mountains, fjords, volcanoes, pampas and ice fields is a top activity.

Nimmo Bay, British Columbia, Canada

Piney, green and pristine, Nimmo Bay is on the British Colombian coast north of Vancouver Island. Its main lodge building and an attached bakery were built on giant floats, a bobbing foundation that made no impact on the land. A water-powered generator and a fast-flowing waterfall supplies 80 percent of the resort's power needs. Rafting, catch-and-release fishing and sea kayaking are popular day trips.

Avalon Coastal Retreat, Australia

Tasmania's Avalon Coastal Retreat on Great Oyster Bay is a private eco-cottage with elements like rainwater tanks and indigenous landscaping. In its three guest rooms and common areas, the resort encourages soaking up the austere, otherworldly environment of light playing on rocks and waves crashing on a craggy shore. Its architecture — all glass and timber and steel — lends a modernist mien to the concept of an eco-lodge.

Lapa Rios Ecolodge, Costa Rica

Minnesota natives John and Karen Lewis liquidated their assets to purchase the land for Lapa Rios Ecolodge, a resort with bungalows lining three rainforest ridges. A three-story hardwood circular stairway in the main lodge and a lookout onto the rainforest canopy are highlights. Activities focus on the forest and the nearby ocean, with hiking, birding, kayaking, horseback riding and surfing among the most popular distractions.

Tiamo Resorts, Bahamas

On South Andros Island, a little-developed sanctum of the Bahamas, Tiamo Resorts bills itself as the Caribbean's most environmentally sensitive tourism operation, with thermal hot-water heaters, low-flush composting toilets, solar paneling, low-impact architecture

and other eco-amenities. Guests sleep in private beach bungalows, taking nature hikes, snorkeling or casting for elusive bonefish during the day.

El Pescador Resorts, Belize

El Pescador was long known as a world-class fishing destination. But since coming under new ownership in 1997, the resort has established itself as an eco-friendly tropical getaway, including a recent commitment to offset all carbon emissions generated by its guests flying to Belize. El Pescador offers accommodations in guests rooms within its large mahogany main lodge, as well as with several beachfront cabins that have unencumbered views into the Caribbean blue waters beyond.

Maho Bay/Concordia, St. John

Since 1976, one of the world's most renowned eco-resorts has existed on this least-populated island of the USVI. Today, 114 tents make up Maho Bay Camps inside Virgin Islands National Park, while three sister resorts have been added. Solar power, rain collection, recycled building materials and elevated walkways are just a few of the eco-techniques employed across the island, which offers differing levels of comfort (without sacrificing eco-standards). The tents at Maho Bay, for example, are very basic, while the Estate Concordia Studios offer nine luxe suites with features like vaulted ceilings and wraparound decks with full ocean views.