

RAJA AMPAT BIODIVERSITY ECO RESORT

Connecting with Nature in one of the most celebrated dive destinations on the planet doesn't have to break the bank.

Reynaldo Corral and Patricia Sanz, owners of the Raja Ampat Biodiversity Eco Resort, which is based on the island of Gam, are aware that the term "eco resort" is bandied around too easily, and would rather honestly describe their operation as an "eco concept" resort.

Reynaldo explains, "Our intention, as divers and Nature lovers, is a resort that practices environmentally sustainable eco-tourism in the hope of managing natural resources, to help improve the lives of the surrounding community as well as maintaining the quality of the environment around the island of Gam."

Their Papuan-style buildings, built by craftsmen from the neighbouring villages, and using local, sustainably sourced materials, are arranged to cause the least

disturbance to natural flora and fauna. Landscaping is left to return to its natural state, with grass giving way to native ground cover.

On a daily basis, the resort's operations revolve around reducing impact where possible. Resources are conserved, reduced and recycled, with features like traditional "mandi" style showers in most of the rooms, water dispensers, kitchen supplies bought in bulk, and containers reused to store fuel. Recycling bins dot the site, and guests are asked to help take old batteries home with them to be disposed of properly. Old engine oil is up-cycled and used to waterproof timber and protect it from the sun, old sheets are turned into rags for cleaning, and aluminium cans are sold for recycling in Wasai. From this year, the resort will also be fully solar powered.

Supporting and being integrated into the local community is an essential aspect of any resort that seeks sustainability. The staff is primarily made up of local Papuans,

most hired without any previous experience in the hospitality or diving industry, and trained in all areas of the business. Local guides lead jungle treks to see the famous birds of paradise, activities from which they earn every cent. The resort also makes yearly contributions to the local villages, in the form of hundreds of kilograms of rice, sugar flour and other staples, as well as school uniforms and shoes for the primary school children.

With a strict policy of not serving reef fish, most produce, where possible, is also sourced directly from the local villages. All cooking is done with natural coconut oil, made exclusively by local women. Village-grown spinach, sweet potatoes, green papaya, chillies and seasonal fruit all make it to the resort's tables.

Reynaldo tells us, "All of our guests agree on the spectacularly rich flora and fauna, both above and below the water in Raja Ampat. We worry that many might consider today's reality the benchmark of extreme biodiversity and beauty. I cannot imagine what these reefs were like in the past, and what they could or should be like now! With this in mind, we urge you to take a few simple measures to limit the impact of your activities wherever you live."



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