

GOING Green

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL HAS GONE FAR BEYOND THE BACK TO BASICS CLICHÉ. GLOBALLY THERE ARE AN INCREASING NUMBER OF LUXURY ECO-RESORTS, WHICH OFFER UNFORGETTABLE, ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY HOLIDAY EXPERIENCES. PREMIER SELECTS A FEW OF ITS FAVOURITES...

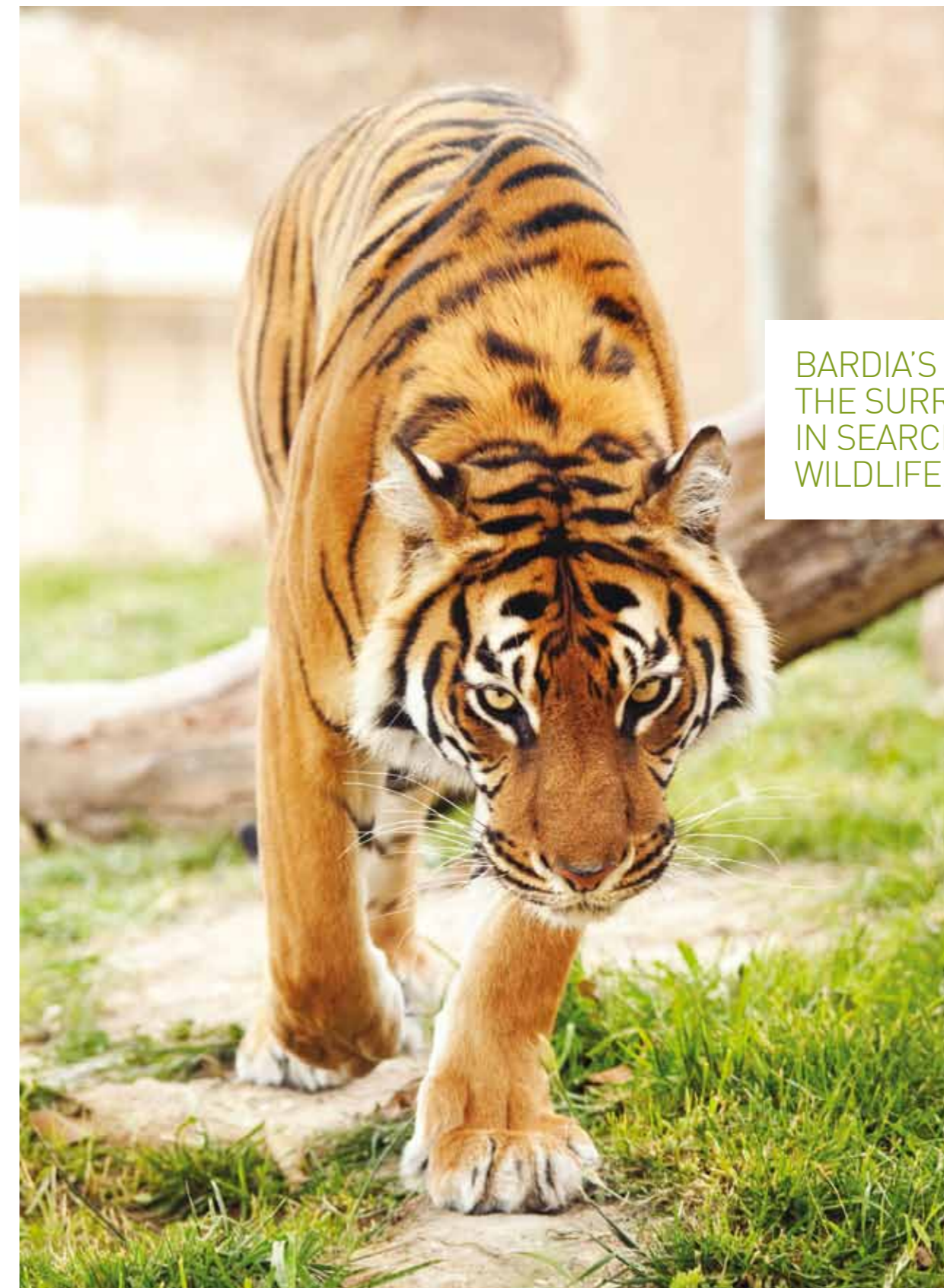
BY // MIKE MACEACHERAN

St Augustine, famous philosopher, theologian and free-thinker, once said that: "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page." In today's modern world, however, the theorist's book would more than likely be made from reused Amazonian wood pulp and the pages fashioned from a recycled banana leaf. Green travel is not only environmentally sound, but — be it through minimising your carbon footprint, choosing an eco-friendly airline or embracing responsible tourism — it is increasingly a more considered and celebrated choice of holiday. For those who have had enough of mass tourism and junket hotels, it is a new way of travelling focused on respecting and benefiting local people and the environment. For one, St Augustine would surely approve.

Yet responsible tourism is also more than just left wing toga-wearing dogma — it need not be down market and its association with wind-blown tents, untrimmed beards and a refusal to shower is far from reality. A new breed of luxury eco-resorts and lodges has brought a more glamorous touch to the jungle and safari camps — and green travel now has more of a silver and gold hue than grubby green. So if you're looking for adventure, discovery or relaxation — but want to maintain your environmental credentials — where are the best places to give a little back to Mother Earth?

ECO-ADVENTURE BARDIA NATIONAL PARK, NEPAL

Bardia National Park is set on the Western flanks of Nepal, a country spoilt with so many natural wonders that its surrounding neighbours are literally green with envy. With highly trained elephants — the ultimate environmentally cared-for vehicle — and inflatable rafts, Bardia's safaris cover the surrounding jungle in search of its rampant wildlife — the Royal Bengal Tiger, Asian one-horned rhinoceros, sloth bear, leopard, golden backed jackal, and four deer species will unquestionably get your adrenalin pumping. Run by Nepal's eco-tourism pioneers, Tiger Mountain, the five star Karnali Lodge and its sister resort — the stunning luxurious tented Karnali Camp on the banks of the Karnali River — offer jungle walks with expert naturalists where rhino and tiger



BARDIA'S SAFARIS COVER
THE SURROUNDING JUNGLE
IN SEARCH OF ITS RAMPANT
WILDLIFE...

tracking and bio-diverse botany is the flavour of the day.

Furthermore, the team at Tiger Mountain is also the initiator of sustainable tourism in the subcontinent. In association with UK charity the International Trust for Nature Conservation (ITNC), the Karnali Lodge conducts a range of research programmes and data collection, making it available to national authorities, researchers and charities. The lodge has also been recognised internationally as a leader in anti-poaching, wildlife crime and conservation activities. But that is not all: the villages of the indigenous Tharu people surround the park and the jungle lodge embraces sustainable Tharu architecture — offering a perfect mix of nature, culture and luxury.

As an eco-adventure, can anything beat the experience of travelling through primeval grasslands atop an elephant that is rumbling its suspicions that a tiger is on the prowl? Not in our book >

WWW.TIGERMOUNTAIN.COM

ECO-RELAXATION

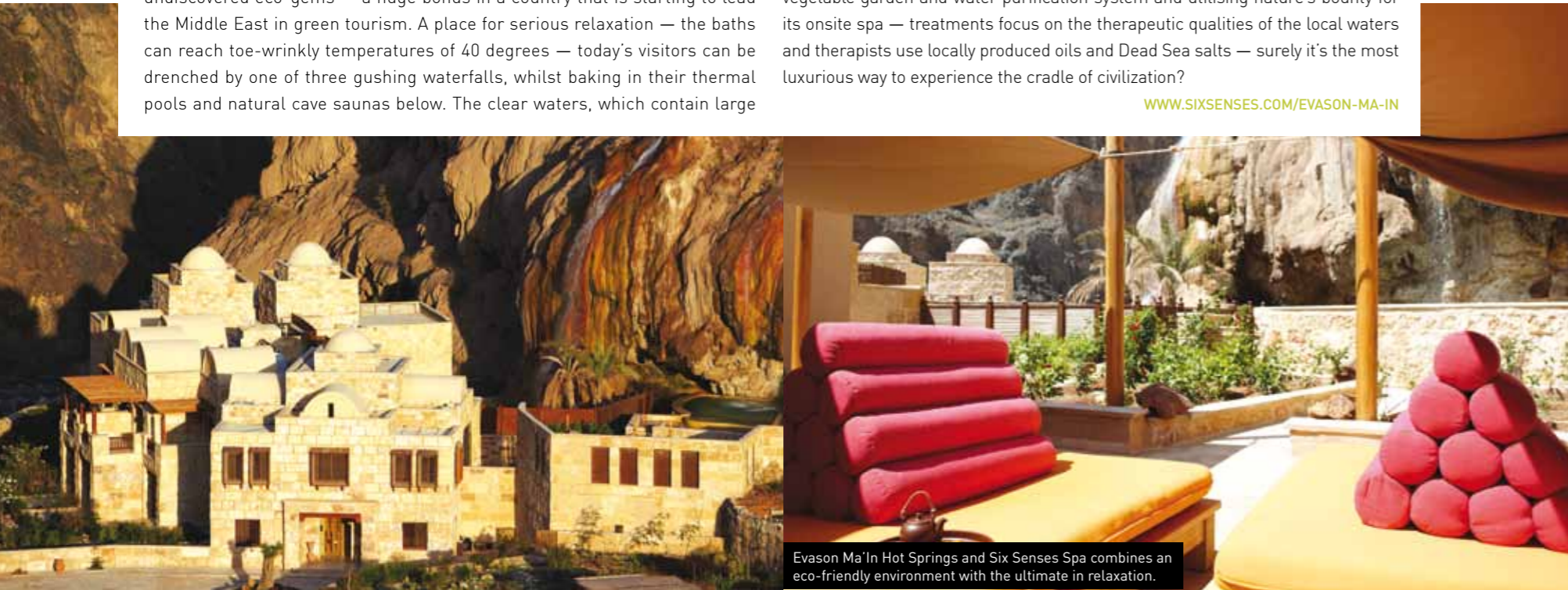
MA'IN, JORDAN

Located at 300 metres below sea level, Ma'in is host to one of the world's oldest natural mineral spas and wears its green credentials on its sleeve. Once used by King Herod — who perhaps used it to soften his scratchy overgrown chest hair — and visited by every chariot-riding Roman Emperor worth a place in history, the Ma'in Hot Springs is one of Jordan's best undiscovered eco-gems — a huge bonus in a country that is starting to lead the Middle East in green tourism. A place for serious relaxation — the baths can reach toe-wrinkly temperatures of 40 degrees — today's visitors can be drenched by one of three gushing waterfalls, whilst baking in their thermal pools and natural cave saunas below. The clear waters, which contain large

amounts of hydrogen sulphide also feed straight into the nearby Dead Sea, itself a historical testament to the power of the thermal water cure and only a catapult shot away.

Nearby, and set like an oasis amidst this brackish landscape, the onsite Evason Ma'in Hot Springs and Six Senses Spa, is an organic haven where mud baths and eco-conscious pampering is put at a premium. Lauded as one of the best eco-resorts and spas worldwide, the five star retreat indulges guests worn out by last year's recession and has green tourism at its heart. Boasting its own vegetable garden and water purification system and utilising nature's bounty for its onsite spa — treatments focus on the therapeutic qualities of the local waters and therapists use locally produced oils and Dead Sea salts — surely it's the most luxurious way to experience the cradle of civilization?

WWW.SIXSENSES.COM/EVASON-MA-IN



Evason Ma'in Hot Springs and Six Senses Spa combines an eco-friendly environment with the ultimate in relaxation.

ECO-DISCOVERY

BORNEO, MALAYSIA

On a tour of Malaysia's eastern outpost, the environmental theme continues unabated. From rainforest kayaking near Kuching in Sarawak to swinging with orangutans at protected nature reserves in Sabah, Borneo is both a timeless and life-changing way to experience a perfect green luxury vacation. In the south, adventure begins on a meandering river in the Bau district, shaded by overhanging canopies of trees and birds before moving into fast flowing water punctuated with Class 1 and Class 2 rapids. A journey north will take the intrepid visitor to the Niah Caves, one of the world's largest underground systems and home to an underworld zoo of bats and subterranean fish. Perhaps the undisputed king of the swingers in Borneo is a visit to the famous Sepilok Rehabilitation Centre, set up to rehabilitate orphan orangutans. With around 60 to 80 orangutans living free in the reserve, it is the best place on Earth to meet this endangered species face to face. More importantly, a visit benefits the mammals in a number of ways — as the entrance fees paid to the centre go directly to paying the staff, providing crucial food sources and training to specialist guides who rehabilitate the orangutans back into the wild. Throw in a climb up Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain in South East Asia, a thrilling canopy walk high above the jungle, scuba diving with endangered turtles off Sipadan Island, unique proboscis monkeys along the Kinabatangan River and a mixture of luxurious resort hotels, idyllic islands and rustic lodges and Borneo has enough eco-wonders to keep you returning year after year. From the gorgeous to the sublime, the Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort, near the city of Kota Kinabalu offers a lush, 400-acre tropical setting.

WWW.SHANGRI-LA.COM/EN/PROPERTY/KOTAKINABALU/RASARIARESORT
WWW.RESPONSIBLETRAVEL.COM



Orangutans are a big part of the Borneo experience, the Shangri-La Rasa Ria Resort's nature reserve is also home to the endangered species.

TOP TIPS

WANT TO GO GREEN?

Before you fly:

The airline industry tends to take the brunt of the critical eco-backlash; yet while air travel is currently a relatively small contributor to global warming (less than five per cent), it is the fastest growing source of global CO2 emissions. It is therefore imperative to choose your time wisely when you go on holiday. Carbon footprint schemes are now in place to help you reduce your emissions when flying and when abroad. Other ways to make a difference are to ask to see the tour operator's policy for responsible tourism, travel by train and public transport where possible and book direct flights to avoid transfers. www.sustainabilityintelligence.com/CarbonResponsible

When you're away:

An important starting point is to use public transport in destinations wherever and whenever possible. Other ways to help make an environmental impact are to take alternative modes of transport — the train remains the most eco-conscious way to get from A to B. Better still, why not try a cycling, trekking, cruising or sailing holiday? Other ways to give back to the local environment include hiring a local guide — you'll discover more about local culture and lives, and they will earn more income — and refusing to buy products made from endangered species or ancient artifacts.

When you return:

Why not donate to a local project in the area you've visited? Take a look at TravelPledge for community and environmental projects around the world. ■

WWW.TRAVELPLEDGE.ORG



Above & below: Whitepod provides a scenic eco-experience as only Switzerland can.

ECO-LEISURE

WHITEPOD, SWITZERLAND

With a splash more effervescent white than forest green in the colour stakes, the Swiss have gone one better than most eco-luxury hotels by coming up with the ultimate eco-winter vacation. Located in Les Cerniers amidst the majesty of the chocolate box Swiss Alps, Whitepod is a unique and exclusive concept billed as the most eco-conscious green lodge on the planet. Comprised of 15 one- and two-bedroom pods, the retreat is fully equipped with eco-bathrooms, wood-burning stoves, and organic furnishings. Additionally, each pod uses minimal water and electricity to allow for a more pristine mountain environment experience, while still providing the comfort and luxury of a high-end boutique hotel. Indeed, Whitepod's 8ft geodesic domes are the lightest, strongest and most cost-effective structures ever devised.

Accessible only by snow-shoe, ski or battery powered snowmobile — Montreux on Lake Geneva is the nearest transport hub — it is perfect for the design-conscious generation as well as athletic James Bond-types. Specialising in Alpine spas, saunas and Swiss-style massage, however, the less active can simply be wine, dine or pampered on the most glamorous slopes this side of St Moritz. Helping define the term "eco-chic", Whitepod is the perfect Alpine alternative to the staid image of chalet holidays — gifting guests solitude, silence, grand cru air quality and a real sense of the life au naturel. And thanks to its Swiss owners, everything runs like clockwork too.

WWW.WHITEPOD.COM



IMAGES: LEFT-HAND PAGE FROM TOP: SIX SENSES RESORTS & SPAS, SHANGRI-LA HOTELS. THIS PAGE: WHITEPOD & SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Sailing holidays are an eco-friendly vacation option.

LOCATED IN LES CERNIERS... WHITEPOD IS A UNIQUE AND EXCLUSIVE CONCEPT BILLED AS THE MOST ECO-CONSCIOUS GREEN LODGE ON THE PLANET.