

TOP 10 ECO-DESTINATIONS in North America

LAUREL KALLENBACH

Save fossil fuel and money by traveling to environmentally responsible lodging closer to home.



You don't have to leave the United States and its contiguous neighbors, Canada and Mexico, to find cutting-edge ecotourism. North America offers a range of environmentally responsible destinations, from sub-Arctic territories to tropical beaches. So why are they so hard to find?

In Africa, Australia, or South America, you'll encounter a host of eco-lodges that practice low-impact tourism involving indigenous people. Yet within U.S. boundaries, ecotourism on that scale is scarce.

This is partly because environmentally responsible tourism has its genesis in developing nations, explains Martha Honey, executive director of the International Ecotourism Society. "Ecotourism's roots go back to Latin America and Africa during the 1970s, with worldwide awareness of the cutting of rainforests and poaching of animals such as rhinos and elephants," she says. "U.S. ecotourism has been hampered because we don't have a centralized government organization such as a national tourism board. It's grown up here in a more disparate way—community by community—but ecotourism is here."

Eco-lodge landscape architect Hitesh Mehta, who works for ESDA, a Ft. Lauderdale, Florida-based planning firm, has another theory. "Americans are wonderful ecotourists," he says. "They love traveling, staying in environmentally responsible places, and meeting local people—and they're willing to pay for those experiences. However, when it comes to development of eco-lodges, America has an abysmal record." The problem, he opines, lies with development and investment companies that demand quick financial returns rather than the higher initial capital and longer-term paybacks of ecotourism.

Defining ecotourism

"Tourism is, essentially and inescapably, environmentally destructive," says Brian Mullis, president of Sustainable Travel International. He notes that according to British "footprinting" company Best Foot Forward, a round-trip traveler flying from London to Brazil uses twice the annual carbon emissions of an average African and half the average annual carbon emissions per person globally.

That's why *Natural Home* advocates travel a bit closer to home. And, we suggest you choose your destination according to these principles:

- It's built using environmentally sound methods and/or operates with alternative energy sources.
- It minimizes human impact on natural habitats and promotes resource conservation.
- It sustains the well-being of local people and/or indigenous communities.
- It helps raise visitors' environmental and cultural awareness.

The following North American accommodations will delight environmentally and socially conscious travelers. Most of these aren't perfect—and a few don't hit all aspects of ecotourism—but as they're continually supported by eco-travelers, they're sure to evolve.

United States

El Monte Sagrado's beautiful adobe-style buildings incorporated recycled fly ash in their construction.



Relax in the luxurious Kama Sutra Room at El Monte Sagrado.



EL MONTE SAGRADO LIVING RESORT AND SPA

TAOS, NEW MEXICO

This adobe-style luxury resort at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo mountains features globally themed suites or casitas that blend into the surroundings.

How it's built: Structures created from an adobe-like material made of recycled fly ash. At the core is the Living Machine, a greenhouse-like system in which plants, fish, and other organisms treat water for reuse.

Alternative energy: Photovoltaic solar cells power the Living Machine; parts of the resort are geothermally heated and cooled.

Conservation practices: Composting, recycling, rainwater collection; pool treated with eco-friendly chlorine substitute; waste water treated and reused for irrigation.

Benefits to local people: At times, water from the Living Machine is returned to the city of Taos. The owner founded a local school.

Educational programs: Tours of the Living Machine.

(800) 828-8267; ElMonteSagrado.com

INN SERENDIPITY BED & BREAKFAST

BROWNTOWN, WISCONSIN

This hundred-year-old farmhouse-turned-B&B is set amid an extensive organic garden south of Madison. A secondary property—a woodsy retreat cabin—is two hours' drive north.

How it's built: Restoration done with salvaged materials, sustainably harvested wood, recycled tile, no-VOC paints and sealers. A solar straw bale greenhouse provides food year-round.

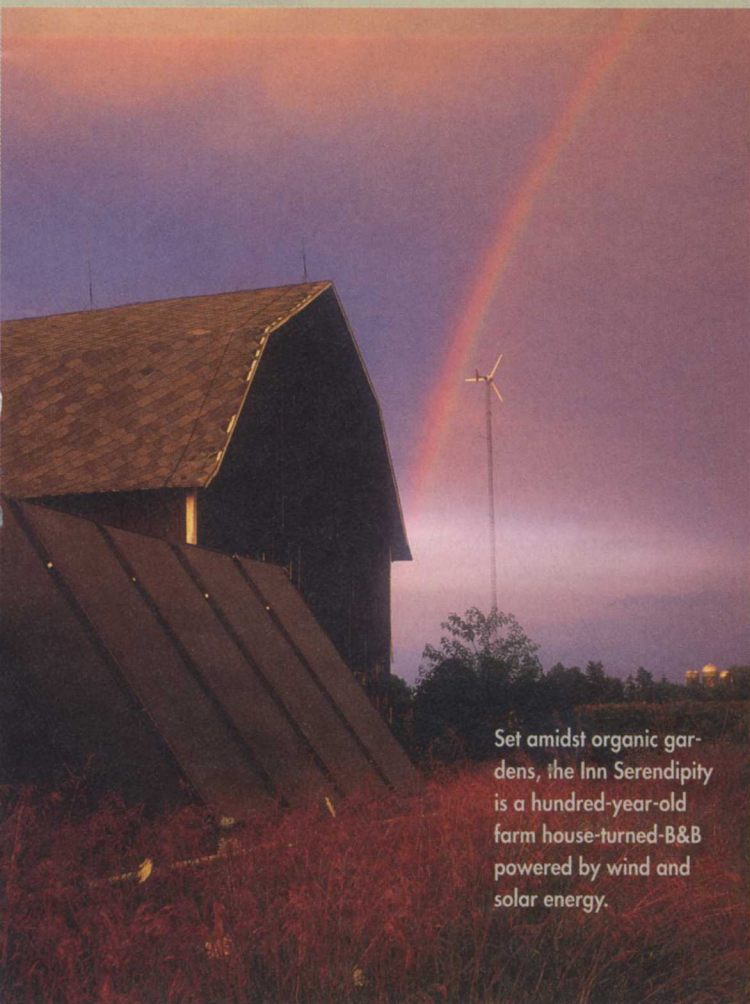
Alternative energy: Wind and solar; wood-stove heating.

Conservation practices: Organic and natural cotton linens, composting, local and home-grown foods, eco-cleaners.

Benefits to environment: Trees for Travel certificates (see page 21) for guests document that trees were planted to offset the CO₂ from their auto trip.

Educational programs: Tours of farm and alternative technologies.

(608) 329-7056; InnSerendipity.com



Set amidst organic gardens, the Inn Serendipity is a hundred-year-old farm house-turned-B&B powered by wind and solar energy.

SADIE COVE WILDERNESS LODGE

HOMER, ALASKA

Visitors take a water taxi to these off-the-grid coastal cabins that accommodate eight guests in Kachemak Bay State Park. This elegantly rustic place has a "leave no trace" philosophy, spectacular views, and hiking, fishing, and wildlife watching.

How it's built: Handmade cabins from milled local driftwood.

Alternative energy: Hydroelectric power from a stream; wind-power backup.

Conservation practices: Recycling, organic vegetable garden.

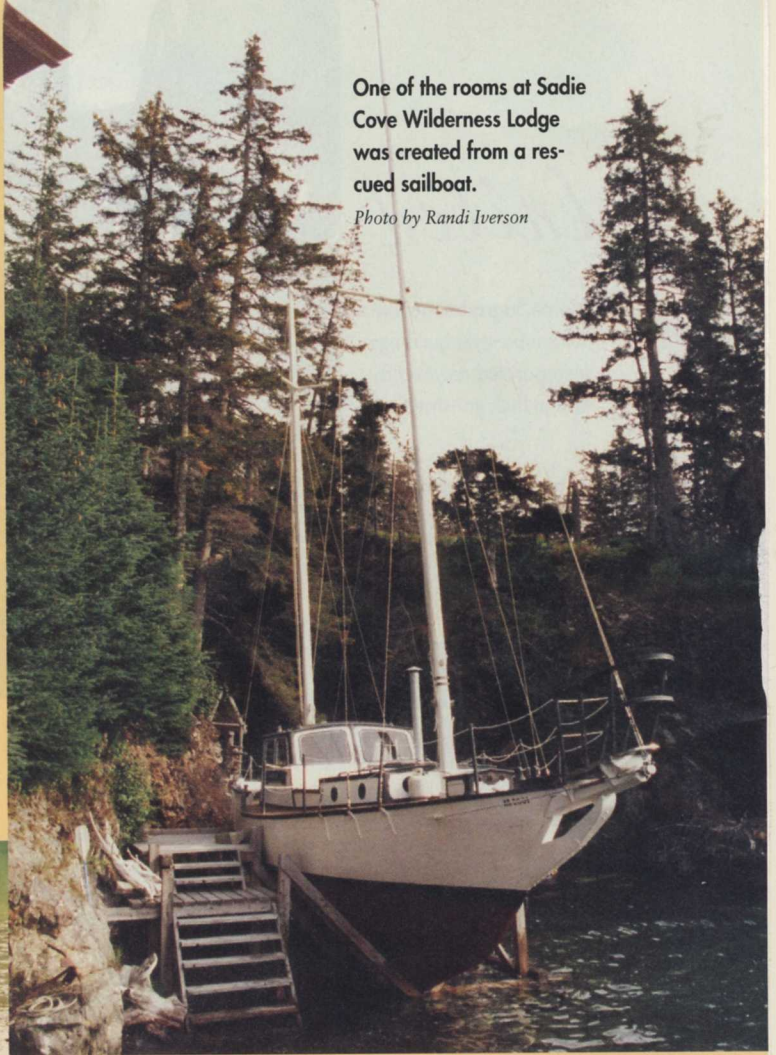
Benefits to local ecosystems: Plans to get the area declared a mountain goat sanctuary.

Educational programs: Nature walks to tidal flats and alpine valleys.

(888) 283-7234; SadieCove.com

The Sadie Cove Wilderness Lodge runs on non-polluting wind and hydro power. It is near Homer, Alaska, the "bear viewing capital of the world."

Photo by Randi Iverson



One of the rooms at Sadie Cove Wilderness Lodge was created from a rescued sailboat.

Photo by Randi Iverson



When you stay at Papoose Creek Lodge, enjoy lake fly fishing at Cliff Lake or test your skills on the blue ribbon waters of the nearby Madison, Henry's Fork, and Gallatin rivers. The cozy guest rooms are cleaned with eco-friendly cleaning products.

PAPOOSE CREEK LODGE

CAMERON, MONTANA

Not far from Yellowstone, Papoose Creek Lodge accommodates sixteen guests on its fifty-acre property, bordered by the 25,000-acre Sun Ranch.

The resort offers horseback riding, fly fishing, hiking, and cultural attractions.

How it's built: Two guest cabins were built from reclaimed snowfence wood; two 1880s-era buildings have been refurbished.

Alternative energy: None

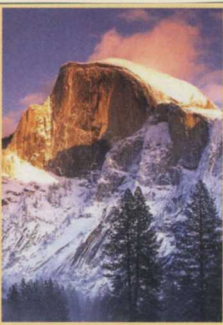
Conservation practices: Eco-cleaners, organic cotton bathrobes, recycling, local products.

Benefits to local ecosystems: Wildlife-friendly fencing; 40 percent of acreage open for wintering elk. Studies on coexisting with elk herds and wolves and trout creek conservation.

Educational programs: Experts address locals and visitors on valley conservation; staff naturalist and environmental specialist.

(406) 682-3030; PapooseCreek.com





**Half Dome in winter—
one of Yosemite's most
spectacular views.**

*Photo courtesy DNC Parks
& Resorts at Yosemite*

America's National Parks protect some of the nation's greatest natural treasures, but they also suffer from destructive tourism. Yosemite gets so many visitors—almost 4 million annually—that the Yosemite Valley has traffic jams and air pollution. So what's it doing on *Natural Home's* list? We just couldn't write off the National Park system, which though beleaguered and underfunded, is getting into the ecotourism game.

About the size of Rhode Island, Yosemite is 95 percent wilderness. The remaining 5 percent (Yosemite Valley) is the domain of cars, RVs, hotels, gift shops, and campsites. To counteract the damage, the park enhanced its traffic-reducing shuttle system with eighteen hybrid buses, removed the parking lot at Lower Yosemite Falls, and is greening its concessions and guest services.

AHWAHNEE RESORT HOTEL

How it's built: A national historic landmark, the Ahwahnee was built in 1927.

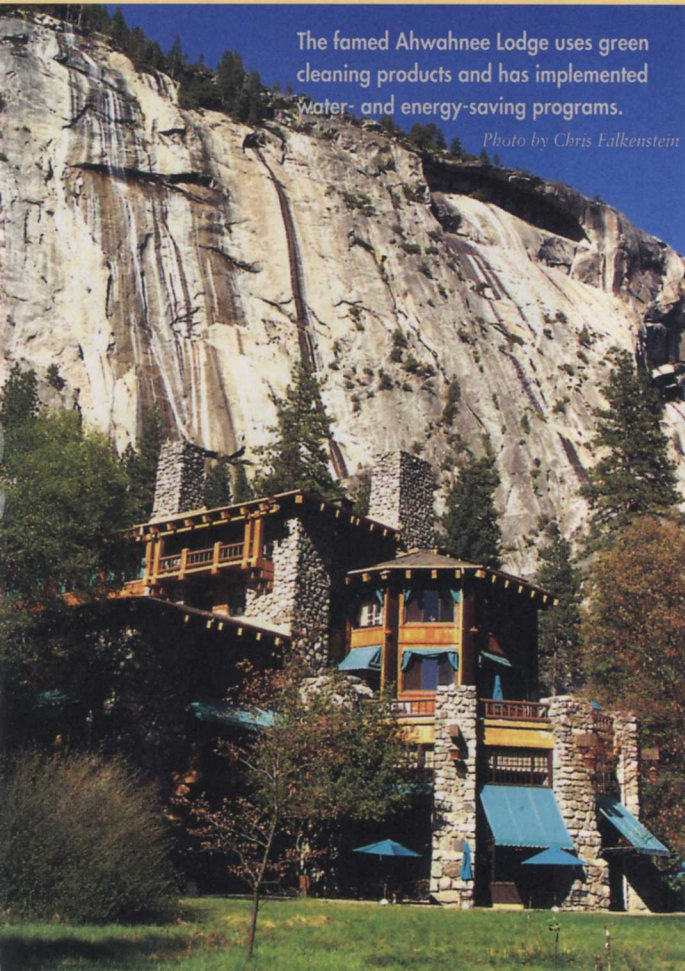
Alternative energy: None

Conservation practices: Compact fluorescent bulbs in public areas, nontoxic cleaning products, waste recycling, water and energy savings programs, organic fertilizers and integrated pest management, native-plant landscaping.

YosemitePark.com

The famed Ahwahnee Lodge uses green cleaning products and has implemented water- and energy-saving programs.

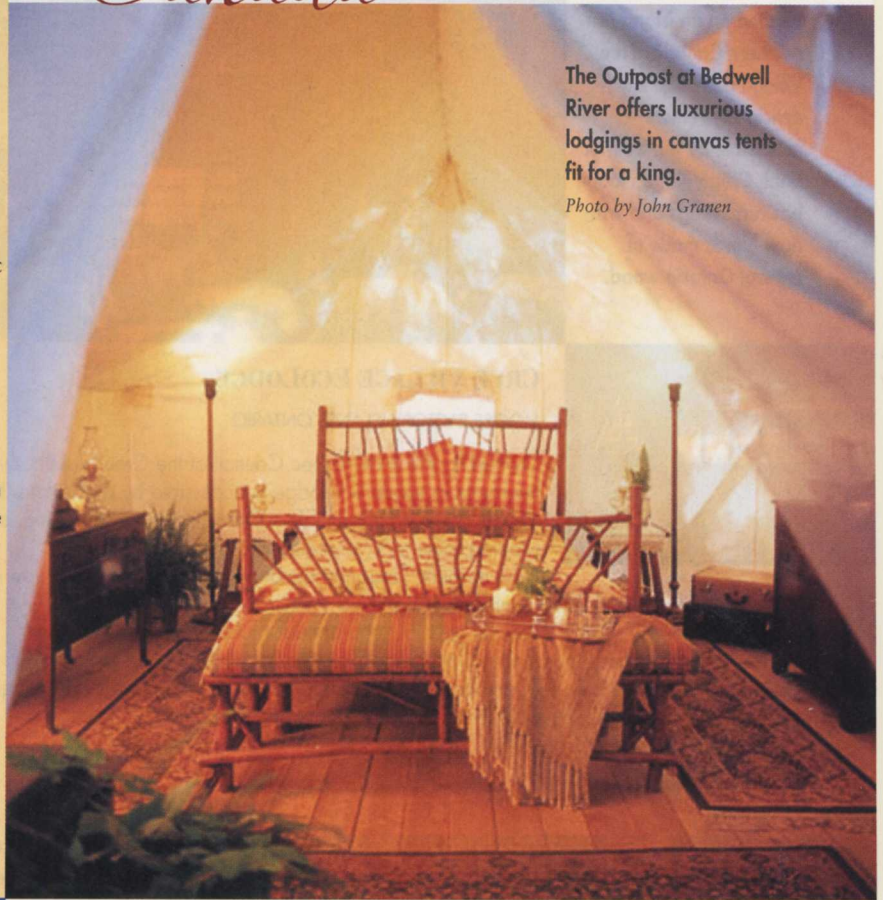
Photo by Chris Falkenstein



Canada

The Outpost at Bedwell River offers luxurious lodgings in canvas tents fit for a king.

Photo by John Granen



WILDERNESS OUTPOST AT BEDWELL RIVER

CLAYOQUOT SOUND, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Accessible by float plane or boat, this summer-only Vancouver Island resort offers luxurious accommodations in canvas tents situated in the rainforest along the Bedwell River.

How it's built: Tents and other buildings are on raised cedar platforms to minimize impact on the land.

Alternative energy: Wind- and solar-powered electricity.

Conservation practices: Composting toilets, gravity-powered water lines, organic garden and greenhouse.

Benefits to local ecosystems: Raptor rehabilitation project, bear mapping, and restoring salmon-spawning habitat.

Educational programs: First Nations interpretive trail on a nearby island.

(888) 333-5405; WildRetreat.com

Hop a float plane or boat to a romantic eco-friendly getaway at The Outpost at Bedwell River in British Columbia—a summer-only resort powered by wind and solar energy.

Photo by Albert Normandin



more Canada

Located on an island in northern Canada, Cree Village EcoLodge is deliciously remote—accessible by air, train or boat. Cree Village's lodge has furnishings and window blinds made of natural Ontario wood.



CREE VILLAGE ECOLODGE

MOOSE FACTORY ISLAND, ONTARIO

Owned by the MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation, this twenty-room island eco-lodge is accessible by air or train/boat. Visitors participate in whale sighting, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, river trips, and cultural tours.

How it's built: Designed according to Cree values with an A-frame replica of a traditional winter dwelling.

Alternative energy: Currently on the grid, but equipped for future wind and solar.

Conservation practices: Efficient insulation and triple-glazed windows. Organic carpets and bedding, linens, and pillows; composting toilets. Organic herb garden and composting.

Benefits to local people: Employs locals, most of whom are aboriginal.

Educational programs: Canoe trips; Cree craft and cooking demonstrations.

(888) 273-3929; CreeVillage.com



Forest House Eco-Lodge is nestled in the Boreal Forest of Canada's vast Precambrian shield—8 kilometers and 4 portages from the road. Enjoy home-cooked meals with produce fresh from the organic gardens.

FOREST HOUSE ECOLODGE

AIR RONGE, SASKATCHEWAN

Three quaint wilderness eco-cabins in northern Saskatchewan's boreal forest and lake country are set amidst some of the world's best canoe country.

How it's built: Combination log/wood-frame cabins made of materials rescued from landfills and selectively harvested trees.

Alternative energy: Solar with backup generator, woodstove heating.

Conservation practices: Organic garden, composting, graywater systems, recycling program.

Benefits to regional ecosystems: The owners are fighting to protect the area from logging.

Educational programs: Nature walks; staff ethnobotanist.

(306) 635-2242; ForestHouse.ca



Mexico

DANZANTE ECO-RESORT

BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

This remote eco-lodge, perched unobtrusively on ten acres of volcanic hills overlooking the Sea of Cortez, offers hiking, horseback riding, and a white-sand beach.

How it's built: Sand and clay adobe bricks, woven palm-frond roofs (*palapas*), volcanic stone walkways and terraces.

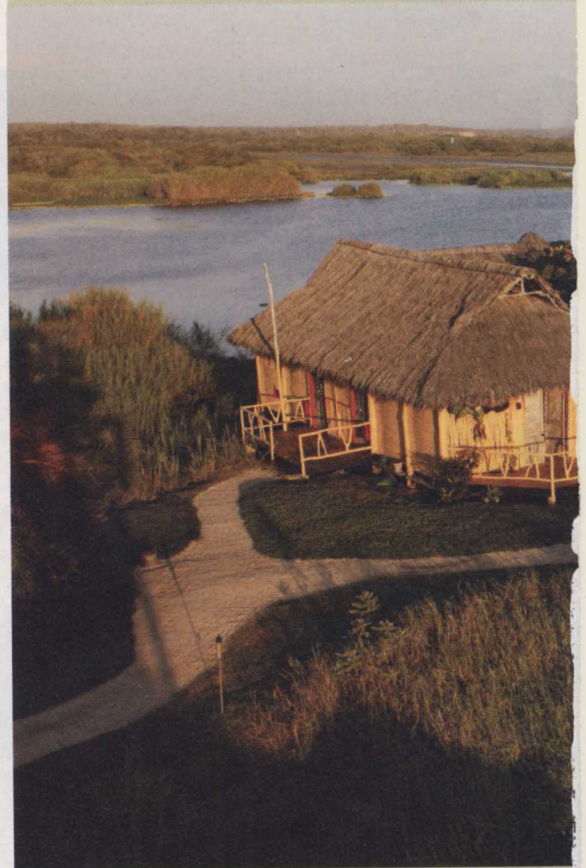
Alternative energy: 100 percent solar powered.

Conservation practices: Some graywater reuse, fluorescent lights, organic garden.

Benefits to local people and ecosystems: Employs only local villagers. The owners provide no-interest loans for area families to develop home solar systems.

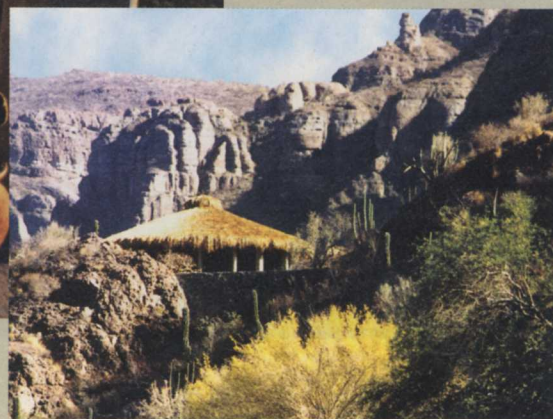
Educational programs: Local guides teach about medicinal herbs, sea and animal life.

(408) 354-0042 (California);
Danzante.com





Ahhh...stretch out in a hammock with a favorite book and relax seaside at Danzante. Located in volcanic hills in Baja California, Danzante Eco-Resort features mountains and canyons for hiking.



HOTELITO DESCONOCIDO

COSTA ALEGRE, JALISCO

Sixty miles south of Puerto Vallarta, the "Unknown Hotel," nestled between the Sierra Madre mountains and the Pacific, is perfect for bird watching, windsurfing, sailing, kayaking, and mountain biking.

How it's built: Palapa roofs shade the indigenous-style bungalows, called *palafitos*, built on stilts near the water.


Alternative energy: Solar power and lamps.

Conservation practices: "Bio-digester" sewage system, biodegradable cleaning products and in-room amenities.

Benefits to local people and ecosystems:

Actively promotes sea turtle program.

Educational programs: From June through January guests can join the staff biologist in helping turtle hatchlings scramble to the sea.

(800) 851-1143; Hotelito.com 

Hotelito Desconocido is built in the style of an old Mexican fishing village. Gauzy curtains partially screen sumptuous beds.

Learn More

AMAZON INTERACTIVE

The Ecotourism Game: Lets you be a Quichua tribal member and illustrates the ups and downs of creating an ecotourism project. EduWeb.com/ecotourism/eco1.html

CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

Tips on traveling conscientiously. EcoTour.org

INTERNATIONAL ECOTOURISM SOCIETY

Ecotourism.org

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL INTERNATIONAL

Eco-certification and ideas for responsible travel. SustainableTravel.com

