

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Non-profit hotels are attracting a new generation of socially conscious travellers. TEXT: SARAH LOLLEY



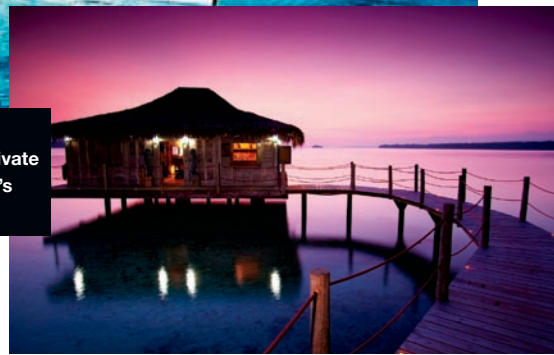
The 200-year-old villas at Ratua Private Island; the resort's Jon Whittle Spa

Pristine turquoise waters. A private villa on a secluded beach. The sound of banana leaves waving in the wind. Everything about Ratua Private Island in the Republic of Vanuatu is profoundly relaxing. You can spend the morning paddling along the shoreline in a traditional Vanuatuan outrigger canoe, the afternoon napping on the deck of your 200-year-old villa and the evening dining al fresco on white linens at the main lodge. (You will find your way there by the flickering light of solar-powered lanterns.) It's all that you would expect from a five-

star property on a private South Pacific island. But what might catch you by surprise is that Ratua Private Island is a non-profit hotel, and it's one of many like-minded properties springing up around the world to satisfy the discerning—some might even say, socially responsible—tastes of a new generation of travellers. “Savvy consumers—particularly from European and North American countries—are thinking about how sustainable their travel purchases are,” explains Andrea Baldwin, vice-president of membership and advisory services at Canadian Business

for Social Responsibility, a non-profit business organization.

At Ratua Private Island, which was founded by a philanthropic French billionaire couple in 2008, profits are directed to infrastructure projects at local schools—from improving the water containment units and pipes to supplying new dormitory mattresses—and equipping children with school supplies. “From the beginning, we decided that all the proceeds from





A shaded pool at Hotel con Corazón; the beach at the Cacao Pearl, Palawan, which is set to open in 2012; the Niños Hotel hacienda



the resort would go to the non-profit Ratua Foundation,” says Isabelle Ysos, who discovered and bought the island in 2004 at the end of a world sailing tour with her husband and two young children.

In the city of Granada, Nicaragua, another non-profit hotel is tucked away on a quiet side street, just a few blocks from the city’s bustling main square. The two-star Hotel con Corazón, which opened in 2008, is located in an old colonial great house that features a central courtyard with a plunge pool. If you’re craving adventure, the hotel’s tour agency can book hiking excursions to a local volcano, traditional Nicaraguan cooking lessons or Spanish tutorials. Marcel Zuidhof and Onno Oostveen, the affable Dutchmen who founded Hotel con Corazón, are globe-trotting businessmen who decided they wanted to try something new. “We have friends who manage an orphanage in India,” says Zuidhof. “That triggered us to think, ‘Hey, we’d like to do something similar in the future.’ We want the conscious traveller to have the opportunity to sleep somewhere that helps a community build itself.” Con Corazón (which means “with heart”) devotes

all of its profits to community initiatives, including tutoring programs that help students stay in school.

And more luxe non-profit hotels are on the way. In Northern Palawan in the Philippines, the Cacao Pearl, Palawan, is expected to open in 2012. The five-star resort, set on three kilometres of private beach, will feature an organic jungle spa and a non-motorized water sports centre—with the added appeal that all of its profits will go to local environmental and social programs.

What it all comes down to, says Zuidhof, is creating a fantastic hotel that just so happens to have an added dimension that guests can feel good about. “Through sustainable business, we want to help people find a way out of poverty,” he says. So stay an extra night, book a massage and have another cocktail. After all, it’s for a good cause. ▷

RELAX & GIVE BACK

Get a good night’s sleep at these non-profit getaway destinations.

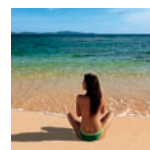
high



RELAX Ratua Private Island (ratua.com.au)

Retreat to your own beachfront villa on a 59-hectare private tropical island in Vanuatu (starting at \$450 a night).

GIVE BACK Hotel profits go to the Ratua Foundation, which has built a new two-room schoolhouse on the nearest populated island, Malo, and provided school supplies to the children. “The first year, we gave out 100 backpacks,” says Isabelle Ysos, who owns the island. “In 2011, we plan to give out 1,000.”



RELAX Cacao Pearl, Palawan (cacaoresorts.com)

Set to open in 2012, this resort in the Philippines will feature a private beach

and an organic spa hidden under the canopy of a rainforest (starting at \$500 a night, all-inclusive). **GIVE BACK** All hotel profits will go to local environmental and social programs.

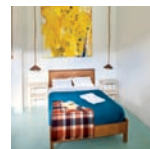
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RELAX Hotel con

Corazón (hotelconcorazon.com) Laze poolside at this boutique hotel in Granada, Nicaragua (starting at \$60

a night). **GIVE BACK** Con Corazón funds intensive after-school tutoring for at-risk students and donates money to two local NGOs that aim to improve education: Empowerment International and La Esperanza.



RELAX Niños Hotel

(ninoshotel.com) Located in a centuries-old colonial building in Cusco, Peru, this backpacker hotel has

minimalist rooms that open onto a charming Spanish-style courtyard and quaint café (starting at \$22 a night). **GIVE BACK** Proceeds from the hotel fund a soup kitchen for local kids (*niños* means children), which offers a hot meal to 500 of Cusco’s most neglected children every day. S.L.