

# ECO-CENTRIC excursions

“TAKE ONLY PICTURES, LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS”—THAT’S THE MANTRA OF THE EARTH-CONSCIOUS TOURIST. HERE, A ROUNDUP OF TRIPS TO DELIGHT THE SENSES AND PRESERVE THE PLANET



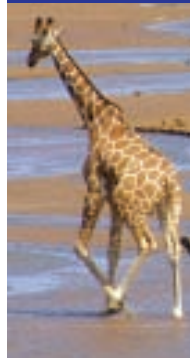
**Among the trees IN BELIZE** From lush green hillsides to cascading waterfalls to winding rivers, Belize is the epitome of an untouched paradise. The Cayo district, near the country’s western border, features some 2,000 square miles of jungles, enormous cave systems, myriad wildlife and breathtaking Mayan ruins. **Ka’ana Boutique Resort** (\$300 to \$400 per night; 011-501-824-3350, [www.kaanabelize.com](http://www.kaanabelize.com)) in the Cayo town of San Ignacio is an intimate 15-room facility that has instituted a “Trade Trees for Travel” program, in which guests plant their tree of choice—ginger and mahogany are among the options—on the property to offset their carbon emissions. In the nearby district of Toledo, with its verdant rainforest, travelers are invited to sleep among the treetops at **Machaca Hill Rainforest Canopy Lodge** (\$650 per night for all-inclusive package; 011-501-722-0050, [www.machacahill.com](http://www.machacahill.com)), offering 12 luxe treehouses and dozens of environmentally focused activities, from coral-reef dives to manatee sightings.

## Smooth sailing on THE MEDITERRANEAN

Can a vehicle that is taller than the Eiffel Tower and boasts a propulsion force similar to a Ferrari also be earth-friendly? Yes, say the folks at MSC Cruises, whose brand-new **MSC Fantasia** (from \$799 for a seven-night cruise; 973-605-2121, [www.mscfantasia.com](http://www.mscfantasia.com)) offers guilt-free luxury: An advanced water-treatment system filters all used on-board water to nearly drinkable levels before releasing it back to sea—far exceeding current maritime standards. Special paints for the hull reduce friction with the water, thereby cutting energy usage. A sensor system monitors cabins and public areas to conserve energy for spaces not in use. Of course, seafaring guests will be too busy enjoying the ship’s four pools, five restaurants, sports bar, casino, disco and water slide—not to mention expansive views of Mediterranean ports—to ponder their carbon footprint.



## ECO-volunteer vacations



Luxury-seekers need not apply. But folks looking to roll up their sleeves and really pitch in for the planet will find a wealth of opportunities through the **Earthwatch**

**Institute** (1-800-776-0188, [www.earthwatch.org](http://www.earthwatch.org)). For close to 40 years this nonprofit has helped give willing volunteers some excellent eco-adventures by matching them with worthy environmental causes across the globe. Yes, the accommodations are modest (often shared bunk-style lodgings), but the experiences are anything but. Among the sample excursions are the 13-day Trinidad Leatherback Sea Turtles expedition (\$2,450 to \$2,750), in which participants patrol sections of Trinidad’s beaches to help tag, measure and weigh these “last living dinosaurs”—some of which can weigh up to 2,000 pounds—and the 15-day Coral and Coastal Ecology of the Seychelles trip (\$2,950), which lets volunteers take underwater videos and photos so scientists can assess the biodiversity of the area’s coral reef.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF BUCUTI BEACH RESORT AND SPA; COURTESY OF TENUTA DI SPANNOCCHIA; BETH MORRIS/EARTHWATCH

LEFT: COURTESY OF MACHACA HILL RAINFOREST CANOPY LODGE; RIGHT: COURTESY OF MSC CRUISES

**CARIBBEAN GREEN IN ARUBA** If unwinding on pristine white sand after a morning of spa pampering sounds like your idea of eco-activism, we’ve got the spot for you: **Bucuti Beach Resort and Spa** in Aruba (from \$364 per night; 011-297-583-1100, [www.bucuti.com](http://www.bucuti.com)) is an upscale haven frequently lauded for its commitment to preserving the Aruban landscape and its environmentally friendly initiatives. Blessed with breathtaking Caribbean views and European-style charm, the resort uses solar-heated water, light and air-conditioning sensors and organic cleaning products, and is active in local sea-turtle protection. Not content to simply lounge? Guests are invited to participate in the regular beach cleanups.



CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT BUCUTI’S COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

**America the beautiful: National parks** These unspoiled spaces are true testaments to the value of conservation. This network of nearly 400 sites offers a glimpse of our land before strip malls and highways reigned supreme. The gem that started it all? **Yellowstone National Park** in Wyoming, designated our first national park in 1872—and it’s little wonder why. Its 3,400 square miles offer ample opportunities for adventure, from horseback riding to hiking, boating and fishing—not to mention peeking at Old Faithful, the best-known of the park’s 10,000 geysers and hot springs. **Death Valley National Park** in California is home to some decidedly unusual plants and animals, plus awe-inspiring landscapes forged from the severe desert climates. You can feast your eyes as you hike the canyons, then relax in the solar-powered oasis that is the lush Furnace Creek Inn (\$305 to \$430 per night; 1-800-236-7916, [www.furnacecreekresort.com](http://www.furnacecreekresort.com)). Prefer a park that’s somewhat closer? Whatever adventure you seek, get guidance at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).



**Farm fresh IN TUSCANY** If there was ever a perfect place to live off the earth, this is it: **Tenuta di Spannocchia** (from \$1,700 for a seven-night family package; 207-730-1154, [www.spannocchia.com](http://www.spannocchia.com)), a bucolic, 1,100-acre organic farm and vineyard nestled southwest of Siena in Italy’s verdant Tuscany region. During weeklong stays, visitors enjoy a pastoral heaven

while learning about the estate’s dedication to sustainable agriculture—and then during Tuscan cooking classes, how to prepare those fruits of the earth to best effect. Each day families are free to explore the property—helping with tasks or simply enjoying the notable scenery from numerous hiking trails. Those with more artistic inclinations might enjoy the painting workshops offered sporadically throughout the year in this most inspiring of locales.