

## Thala Beach Lodge

'Thala Beach Lodge' is a luxurious resort situated just south of Port Douglas, on a private headland at Oak Beach that embraces all elements of the tropics with a 2km stretch of private untouched coastline. Rare coastal vine-rainforests at Thala are a living glimpse into an ancient time when Gondwanan forests covered the land and Australia, India and Antarctica were joined. Offering activities such as birdwatching, nature walks into the rainforest, a coconut odyssey, star watching, sea kayaking to view marine turtles, coastal walks looking for Snub-finned Dolphins and dugongs, presentations by local specialists and an on-site beauty and wellness centre with yoga, 'Thala Beach Lodge' accommodates for everyone. This little slice of paradise is now recognised not only for its unique location and world class restaurant but it also boasts the highest accreditation of eco certification.

The great amount of concern placed on environmental sensitivity and sustainable practices has provided many positive results, not only reducing the carbon footprint and protecting the surrounding flora and fauna but also benefitting the guests. While the guests experience many forms of wildlife around this sanctuary, they develop a greater appreciation for this newly formed co-existence and obtain a deeper awareness of the importance of sustainability. Owners Rob and Oonagh Prettejohn have used this to their advantage in maximising meaningful experiences while minimising the impact on the environment. They have seen a demand within the tourism market for more eco-friendly destinations and through this they have learnt that through integrating more sustainable practices and activities, they are able to offer a unique experience.

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### GETTING STARTED

Originally created to encompass a glimpse at some of the world's most ancient rainforests alongside a colourful piece of the Great Barrier Reef, this destination was created to inspire and encourage adventure while trying to maintain a natural habitat.

### MAJOR INITIATIVES

Major initiatives occur across many aspects of the 'Thala Beach Lodge'; all of which have the key objective of creating a more natural and sustainable destination.

#### Sustainable Features:

- When the lodge was first built, many thousands of indigenous plants were brought in to rehabilitate the area and assist nature to start its return back to a wild natural state.
- The lodge is built out of natural sustainable materials in a low impact style that does not set out to dominate the surrounding landscape.

- Within the 145 acre property there are six different habitats that are all closely monitored to look after each area's unique species.
- Over a period of 30 years, Rob and Oonagh have shepherded the re-establishment of complex forests on land that was once cleared and devastated by extractive farming. With the return of the forests, wildlife populations have exploded bring their pulsating natural energy.
- Rob and Oonagh employ wildlife specialists to guide and amaze their guests to give them a greater understanding and appreciation of the area.
- Thala also recognises the importance of the local indigenous communities and incorporates them through inviting the elders of the 'KuKu Yalanji' community to take the guests through the journey of their culture.
- The 'Thala Beach Lodge' brochure can be viewed on the website rather than mass printing in order to be more eco-friendly.
- A new initiative that will now occur on 'National Tree Planting Day' in August each year is an opportunity for guests to plant a tree for free.

Another clever initiative that 'Thala Beach Lodge' has in an online 'live help' system so that potential visitors can type through any questions they have and obtain an instant response rather than email or call.

#### **KEY OUTCOMES**

While there are no official documents recording whether or not the sustainable practices benefit 'Thala Beach Lodge', the results speak for themselves. Through the incredible effort that has been placed into creating an eco-friendly environment the key outcomes have included:

- A great relationship maintained with the local tribes of the area.
- The opportunity for the guests to become involved in gaining a better awareness of the benefits of sustainability and what they can do to help.
- A wider range of flora and fauna for visitors to enjoy.
- New wildlife being spotted and recorded by guests on a regular basis.
- A relaxed, environmentally friendly destination.

#### **MAJOR CHALLENGES**

Obvious challenge of suffering from fewer visitors due to the effects of the Global Financial Crisis, however, no major areas of concern.

Specifically to our region, there is a problem with air capacity and pricing into Cairns. Here is a seeming paradox. Sustainable tourism businesses are not viable unless a sufficient number of visitors patronise them. To get sufficient numbers of visitors to our destination efficiently relies heavily on air transportation. Economically unviable businesses are, by definition, not sustainable.

Can you please identify any challenges to being sustainable that you have faced – things that may provide insights to other operators.

Sustainable development means making economic sacrifices. For instance lower densities for a smaller environmental footprint. Financial systems, on the other hand, are geared towards security and ability to repay loans.

Making sacrifices for the environment as well as satisfying economic demands is a balance that is often hard to achieve.

#### **ADVICE TO OPERATORS**

Here at Thala we grow our own vegetables and supplement with the freshest of products the region has to offer. As the Chef says, "producing great food and creating a dish from the freshly-picked produce that puts a smile on the customer face is just so rewarding".

#### **NEXT STEPS**

Continue current practices as it is evident that they are successful and benefitting all stakeholders involved.