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VOLUNTOURISM

A 'Holiday for Charity' ethos from the Eco-Logic resort in Paksong

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Phuket is blessed to be surrounded with a wealth of wonderful places to visit in our southern region. From the beauty of the national park at Khao Sok to the wondrous seascapes of Phang Nga, there is much to explore in the neighbouring provinces off the island.

For those searching for something a little bit different that mixes our need to explore, our desire to relax, but also has a 'feel good' factor that will have us glowing on our return... the Eco-Logic, Resort for Charity near the city of Ranong, may be just the ticket.

Eco-Logic is a family-friendly nature retreat over 40 rai located in the middle of the jungle, in Paksong (Chumpon Province), not far from the city of Ranong on the west coast, around 5 hours drive north of Phuket. Eco-Logic stands in a stunning 'return to nature' setting, but the experience is so much more.

The resort promotes the mantra, 'Relax, Experience, Learn', and it is the 'experience' and 'learn' aspect of their offering that sets the resort apart from anywhere you are likely to have visited before.

Eco-Logic is an inherent part of the Thai Child Development Foundation (TCDF), a charity that provides special medical care and education for children with physical disability, learning disabilities or social problems. The founders and their teams work both aspects into a symbiotic relationship and unique experience for visitors and residents from the same location.

Invited by the co-owners, Ingrid van der Straaten and Rosalie Tiegies, I took my family up for a two night stay over the festive break, excited to hide out in the jungle, intrigued by the new wave of 'Voluntourism' and its growing appeal.

Even the trip north calms the nerves from the tumult of Phuket with quality roads, minimal traffic and a scenic backdrop that makes the five hour road-trip pass in a jiffy. Khao Lak provides an ideal pit-stop for lunch and a stretch. And for those without a car, the on-foot traveller can jump on a bus from Phuket Town for a six hour ride, and the resort will pick you up from the nearby main road junction.

On arrival you get an immediate sense of a well organised co-operative. Not just from the staff and visitors, but



Respectful, Loving, Self Sufficient - The core values of the school founded for local children with learning difficulties. Photo: Uma Jacklin.

from the village and wider community at large.

To begin with, it is an idyllic setting. The resort and foundation are nestled within the landscape and cover of the surrounding jungle. Areas open out naturally to the sunlit river that winds itself around the estate. There's an immediate community atmosphere and we're duly welcomed by passing staff and visitors alike.

You get a sense of a self-sustaining resort as you pass the organised agriculture plots, farm animals and energy production systems. There is an air of a well-oiled natural machine.

There are a range of accommodation options at the resort, and my daughter, Uma, and I are placed in a fantastically spacious and artistically decorated Jungalow (see what they did there?), hugging the mountain, and looking out from its vast windows across the winding river just a stone's throw away.

If it's your penchant, you could while away your entire stay here entranced with the wonderment of nature and your undisturbed proximity to it. Your

jungalow also comes equipped with its own little garden, sitting area and fire pit. But the resort offers a range of activities that enhance the nature-seeking visitor's experience including yoga sessions, massage, detox programs, jungle treks and natural hot spring visits.

The resort restaurant is a friendly hangout space with open terrace views across the estate, as well as providing both a communal dining option alongside personal a la carte and beverage needs.

If not satiated enough by this much natural indulgence, just wait until you see the vast night sky, stretching out across the mountain tops with the most stunning cast of uninhibited stars, and a supporting actor of a milky way if you're lucky.

Even the early morning has its treat, as the thick mountain mist rolls across the river, enveloping our bungalow in dense cloud, before clearing away to reveal the source of the surrounding cries and squawks... the ever-present jungle. All in all, it's a perfect family get away.

I met with co-owner, Ingrid, to dis-



The school's program includes educational curriculum, vocational skills and healing massage. Photo: Uma Jacklin

cuss how this incredible project unfolded. Ingrid and Rosalie originally came to the area teaching in local schools. They felt compelled to work with the local community to provide support and facilities for children in need of specialist education and medical attention.

From their own investment they bought the land, an old plantation, in 2006, and developed the infrastructure and facilities organically, as time and finances could afford.

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