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WORLD LEGACY AWARDS 2015

A RESORT TURNING TRASH INTO FUEL. An island racing to be free of fossil fuels by 2020. An innovative nature reserve protecting endemic species and indigenous ways. These are three of the initiatives recognized by the 2015 World Legacy Awards, created by *National Geographic Traveler* in partnership with ITB Berlin—the world’s largest travel trade gathering—to applaud and support a tourism revolution in the making. Sustainable tourism principles are redefining how we explore our planet and the impact we’re having in the process. Among those helping to forge the way forward: the winners and finalists that we profile on the following pages. —*Costas Christ*



WINNER | EARTH CHANGERS

Orange County Luxury Resorts, India

IN A COUNTRY with more than 1.2 billion people (nearly one fifth of the world's population), living in harmony with the natural world takes on a particular urgency—a challenge enthusiastically embraced by India's Orange County Luxury Resorts, a family-run enterprise based in the southwestern state of Karnataka. "We focus on delivering life-enriching experiences to our guests without sacrificing the planet," states the resorts' managing director, Jose Ramapuram, who also serves as an adviser on sustainability for the Karnataka state government.

At its two elegantly rustic villa properties, Coorg and Kabini, recycled and natural materials were used throughout construction, and only indigenous flora provides the landscaping. A reverse osmosis water-purifying system replaces plastic water bottles in all 80 villas and cottages, wind-power generators deliver energy, kitchen waste is transformed into biogas for cooking, and remaining waste is weighed, cataloged, and recycled to improve sustainability. The guest activities reflect a "spirit of the land" philosophy, from tiger-spotting excursions in Nargarahole National Park to bird-watching on resort property, participating in traditional dances, volunteering for plantation chores, and exploring local waterways on boat safaris. www.orangecounty.in

MUST-SEES Iruppu Falls: Legend has it that the god Lakshmana shot an arrow into the lush hills, resulting in the thundering cascade of water that locals believe has the power to wash away sins. The Karaga Festival: This nine-day celebration, held March-April and one of India's oldest, honors the Hindu goddess Shakti with an elaborate procession of religious floats and hundreds of devotees in traditional dress.



POOLSIDE AT ORANGE COUNTY RESORTS' COORG PROPERTY



HUAORANI TRIBESMAN

WINNER | ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

TROPIC JOURNEYS IN NATURE, ECUADOR

TRAVEL OUTFITTER Tropic Journeys in Nature wants to change how ecolodges operate by offering not just employment to local communities but ownership of the lodge itself. Its Huaorani Ecolodge, in Ecuador's Amazon region, is owned by the indigenous Huaorani people, who set their own salaries and plow profits back into community projects; Tropic Journeys is their partner in managing the lodge. This collaboration has led to the creation of a 135,908-acre nature reserve that is off-limits to oil companies (which have wanted to drill for underlying crude oil), allowing visitors to experience one of the most species-rich places on Earth, home to such unique rain forest animals as spectacled bears and pygmy marmosets.

"It takes years of patient dialogue to fully engage indigenous communities," says Jascivan Carvalho, Tropic Journeys' owner, "but the result is a deeper, more enriching experience for travelers—and for locals, whose livelihoods improve." Tropic Journeys' two decades in the Amazon inspired another community tourism project, on Floreana Island in the Galápagos. www.huaorani.com

MUST-SEES Wildlife: Colorful scarlet macaws share the nature reserve with tropical tree frogs, spider monkeys, tarantulas, and river-dwelling caimans.