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## MORE ECO ADVENTURES By Stephen Camelio

### LA RUTA MOSKITIA ECOTOURISM ALLIANCE



For most communities going green means a change of lifestyle, but the indigenous groups that live in and around the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve in northeastern Honduras are going green to try to maintain their way of life. Three years ago, with the help of Rare Conservation, a Wash. DC-based conservation organization, the natives of the region banded together to create La Ruta Moskitia Ecotourism Alliance. Since its inception there has been a steady, but not overwhelming, influx of tourists who come to travel in the local guides' pipantes (motorized dug out canoes), stay in rustic but comfortable eco-lodges and view the region's rich biodiversity that includes rare flora such as medicinal plants and orchids and exotic fauna like crocodiles, howler monkeys, and, if you are lucky, the allusive harpy eagle or jaguar. Furthermore, with the project being 100 percent managed by the Alliance since year two, the trips are, according to Rare Conservation's senior manager of enterprises Matthew Humke, "an instant and honest window into these local tribes without a Disney World feel because guest aren't being ferried around by a Dutch trip leader or buying a trip from a French company." And of course the tribes and environment benefit as well. With money coming in from eco-travelers, the local don't have to rely exclusively on the Biosphere's natural resources for sustenance, thereby easing the damage done by overfishing and deforestation. The Alliance has also become an active participant in preserving the Biosphere, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, by channeling 10 percent of gross revenues to support local conservation projects such as mangrove reforestation, waste management and environmental education. Trips range from four to nine days and include all lodging, food, boat transportation, tours and Spanish-speaking guides. From \$675 per person, [larutamoskitia.com](http://larutamoskitia.com).

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**SOUTHERN OCEAN LODGE**



South Australia's Kangaroo Island is "the Galapagos of Australia," according to James Baillie, who along with his wife Haylie owns the new Southern Ocean Lodge. Given this description, and the fact that one-third of the island's 2,000-square miles are designated a Conservation or National Park to protect the local array of wildlife and native bush land, you might figure there wouldn't be much room for a luxury eco-resort. You'd be wrong. By working closely with the Australian government and environmentally conscious architect Max Pritchard, the Baillie's were able to situate the highly-sophisticated Southern Ocean Lodge on this insular land-mass known for being a home to sea lions, fur seals, little penguins, koalas, wallabies and, of course, kangaroos. Though James and Haylie obtained 250 acres overlooking the crashing surf in Hanson Bay, they only developed one percent of the land, leaving the remaining spread in a Heritage Agreement to protect against future development. In partnership with the state of South Australia, the Baillie's also created the Southern Ocean Lodge "Environment Fund" to the support local environmental projects. As for the actual lodge, Pritchard, taking inspiration from the surrounding landscape, created a breathtaking, serpentine building of recycled materials and local limestone, that becomes one with its natural surroundings. To minimize impact to the surrounding land, the Lodge was designed with a ventilation system and an exterior glazing that take advantage of the island's weather patterns as well as including a innovative water filtration system that cleans wastewater and sewage so that it can be used for irrigation. A stay at Southern Ocean Lodge includes daily breakfast, lunch, four-course dinner, selected beverages, complimentary drinks from the mini-bar and lobby bar as well as local guided adventures and experiences. Baillie says he and his wife created the Lodge to be "a celebration of a wild place," and in doing so have fashioned an establishment worthy of its magical location. From \$900 per person, per night (two-night minimum); southernoceanlodge.com.au

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