

Travel

The savvy traveller's guide to the world

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Garden of Eden

*Global Nomad tours
the Philippines, p50*

All the travel news you can use

Travel



Global Nomad, Philippines

This summer, luxury travel agency Global Nomad launches a new line of tours to a series of privately owned islands and beaches in the Philippines. On these trips, which include the pristine beaches of the Batanes, the terraced landscapes of Banaue, the historical Spanish town of Vigan, and the soaring cliffs and sands of Palawan, tourists stay at picturesque villas rented out by their wealthy owners, offering a homely and personal experience while on vacation. With activities such as rock climbing, hiking, trekking, and scuba diving on offer, visitors can experience thrills in the comfort of privacy and spend with a clear conscience, because much of what is charged by Global Nomad will be returned to the communities through projects dedicated to preserving the local culture and environment. Many of the Philippines are still unscathed by the ecological toll that extensive tourism has taken on hotspots such as Thailand and Malaysia, and Global Nomad seems dedicated to keeping it that way. www.global-nomad.com.

Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island, Australia

If you can't make it to the Galapagos Islands for your summer holiday, why not go to its Australian equivalent? Kangaroo Island is a sea of green landscapes, clear blue waters, bone white beaches, and abundant wildlife. Affectionately known as KI by locals, the scenic island was recently declared a National Landscape by Australia's tourism board. The place to stay on the island is the Southern Ocean Lodge. This luxury-meets-nature hotel is celebrating Australia's cool season with a hot offer: if you stay four nights (\$16,000 per person), the last night's stay is complimentary. The Remarkable Retreat package also includes two \$300 spa treatment vouchers, as well as a gift bag filled with local goodies

exclusive to Kangaroo Island. And if that hasn't convinced you, the lodge is nestled on a clifftop overlooking the Southern Ocean. It might even be better than Galapagos. Offer ends August 31. www.southernoceanlodge.com.au.



Shangri-La's Villingili Resort and Spa, Maldives

Ever since you read *The Swiss Family Robinson* as a child, you probably never stopped imagining what it would be like to live in a tree house. Now you can relive your youthful fantasy and rediscover the tropics from new heights, with a trip to Shangri-La's new Villingili Resort and Spa on Addu Atoll in the southern Maldives. Composed of 142 villas in total, 16 of these are treehouse villas that perch on three metre tall stilts, each with an elevated infinity pool and spacious wooden deck. Shangri-La is currently offering a special package in which you can enjoy a seven-night visit while only paying for five, including a complimentary CHI spa treatment. For those who like to keep it short and sweet, a three-night trip includes a free night on the (tree) house. Prices start at \$6,665 per night for both long and short package trips. Offer valid until October 31. www.shangri-la.com/en/property/male/villingiliresort.



Check-in

Songtsam Retreat, Shangri-La



Location

As the title suggests, this new hotel is in the famous town of... Zhongdian. Well, what was formerly known as Zhongdian. In 2001, the name of the county was officially changed to Shangri-La in an effort to attract foreign tourists, and, presumably, overseas hotel investment; such as this boutique property from Accor.

First impressions

Perched at a height of 3,300 metres above sea level, the property's low-storey stone architecture blends in with its breathtaking surroundings – not to mention its neighbour the Songzanlin Monastery. Dating back to 1679, it is the largest Tibetan religious site outside of Tibet proper.

Accommodation

The 75 rooms and suites all feature working fireplaces, timber floors, oak wall panelling, Tibetan rugs, and wooden bath tubs – plus views of the lush green hills (or snow-capped peaks if you visit in winter). If we had to sum up in two words, they'd be: rustic charm.

Facilities

In keeping with the relaxed atmosphere, the simple facilities consist of a spa, Western and Tibetan restaurants, and a bar with expansive terrace. The hotel can also arrange tours of the monastery and town, as well as hiking and horse riding excursions.

The verdict

This isn't a destination where you come to party; rather it's the ideal place for quiet reflection. As such, the Songtsam has perfectly captured the spirit of Shangri-La – even if that isn't its real name. *Simon Ostheimer*

+86 887 828 5555; www.mgallery.com. See website for special offers.



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QANTAS	PERTH	\$3,620 up	30/09/09
CATHAY PACIFIC	VANCOUVER	\$6,500 up	17/07/09

Sales period from now until July 31. Price fluctuation is at the discretion of airlines, tax and surcharges not included. Terms and conditions apply. Call 3151 8855 for bookings and enquiries, or see www.swiretravel.com.