

# Bunaken Oasis Resort

— a template for a luxury eco resort  
(Ocean Geographic Pristine SEE AWARD 2018 Finalist)

By **Gill McDonald**

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How many of us have been on holiday and experienced a jolt of mist-clearing clarity? “Let’s take a sabbatical and travel for a while”. “I wonder if I could get a job here”. “Why don’t we start our own dive centre”. Holidays can have a profoundly mind-altering effect, freeing the imagination and sending it soaring, flying, dreaming.





Of course, very few of us actually go through with these life-changing schemes and instead go through check-in and happily head home. Elaine and Simon Wallace are a remarkable British wife-and-husband team who actually made their dream come true when they created their beautiful ecological, ethical and luxury vision in the form of Bunaken Oasis Resort in North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Right from the beginning, Elaine and Simon were 100% committed to making Oasis not just eco-compliant in as many ways as possible, but also ethically sound. One of the most important principles of Oasis is their commitment to best employment practices. They employ only Indonesian managers, promote from within and pay at least the national minimum wage to all duty levels. “Our management team are brilliant,” explains Elaine. “We were advised it was a mistake not to have international staff in senior management positions, but we stuck to our principles and all our managers are Indonesian. We have absolutely no need for imported international managers.”

“Our infrastructure is far more advanced than any eco-resorts we have experienced. The ecological footprint is minimal in comparison to less luxury resorts that portray themselves as eco. For example, all structures are ‘floating’ to minimise

ground impact, even the swimming pool. Cottage and restaurant furniture is made on site by local artisans. The wood is an Indonesian hardwood sourced under licence from government managed forests. Jobs are created and sustainable materials are used, and the output is beautiful, customised furniture for our luxuriously appointed cottages.”

Notwithstanding the unwavering commitment to eco and ethical practices and refusal to change direction in the face of many challenges, it was also a very ambitious project geographically. Bunaken Island is separated from the volcanic mainland and the prime city of Manado by an abyssal stretch of the Celebes Sea. The greatest single challenge was taking delivery of the huge 300KVa generators. They were destined for the top of the steeply sloping site on a rural island with no proper roads and no vehicles with more than two wheels.

Together with their local partner, Elaine and Simon have built a relationship with villagers from the even more remote, perfect volcano-shaped island of Manado Tua next door. “When we needed help, these guys were amazing. They heaved beds over balconies high off the ground and shifted wardrobes, trees and building materials. They are also extremely skilled artisans and we continue to work with them for development projects

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# AN ETHICAL RESORT SHOULD POSITIVELY IMPACT THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY. MANY RESORTS CLAIM TO BE ETHICAL, BUT THEY SOMETIMES PAY FAR LESS THAN MINIMUM WAGE. WE BELIEVE THAT GIVING PEOPLE SELF-RESPECT WITH A GOOD JOB AND PROPER SALARY, IS A FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENT OF AN ETHICAL APPROACH.

around the resort. When the generators arrived, they dragged individual parts uphill on rolling pipes and bamboo. It was an incredible effort and we are profoundly grateful. We are supporting several community development schemes for these villagers in return for their invaluable help.”

One of the strongest themes throughout the resort development was the steadfast commitment to the original mission statement.

The Wallaces have never compromised, even when it was extremely challenging to get materials or new technology to the site. Several contractors tried to influence them to use easier, traditional but less effective installations, but they held firm. For example, the local architect was surprised by the high standards in the staff village built, and the strong focus on the white and black water processes.

The staff accommodation is purpose-built and uses the same water supply and general facilities as the guest villas. The staff village consists of twin rooms with two rooms sharing a bathroom; it also has a great canteen and a lounge area with TV. Toilets and showers are provided for non-resident staff to use. Guests are openly invited to visit the staff village.

There is also a very impressive black sewage and grey water waste system to thoroughly break down and recycle all sewage. This is the first (and only) such system in Bunaken National Park. The system includes laundry neutralizers, kitchen grease traps



and skimming tanks prior to underground treatment processes. The final stage is a charcoal filter pit.

There is a state-of-the-art white-water system consisting of water makers, UV treatment and a ceramic lined storage tank. All water within the resort is drinkable, with the pipes conforming to drinking water standards, and all dispensers around the resort are filled from this. This water is subject to additional

filtering and treatment, and the bottles are sterilised between uses. The drinking water is tested monthly at an independent laboratory in Manado, and the latest report is available for guests to view on request.

Oasis has an organic garden on undeveloped land. “We try to grow as many fruit and vegetables as we need, both in the restaurant and for the staff canteen,” explains Elaine. “Guests are encouraged to visit the garden. Food trash is handled in two ways. Waste food from the restaurant is available for local pig farmers and the remainder is composted within the three-chamber compost system on the far side of the organic garden. Plastics are sorted and taken to Manado where they are sold for recycling. When necessary, Oasis will pay for the recycling disposal of plastics.”

The Bunaken Oasis boat goes out daily, often more than once, to remove visible plastic and trash from the surrounding waters. This is done voluntarily to the benefit of all local and visiting





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resorts and consumers. “We now have a small boat dedicated to this task,” Elaine explains. “Our aim is to prevent unnecessary waste from reaching the beach. Organic waste is also removed and managed.”

Oasis operates a number of schemes for the local community. Elaine elaborates, “We provide free, fresh drinking water in a tank outside the resort for the local population to access. We have provided roof tiles for a village church. We offer training placements for high school pupils. We are making furniture for children in a local primary school. Our strongest commitment is to provide good employment with a proper wage. We are now the largest single employer on Bunaken Island. We are often told that Bunaken is proud of Oasis. They are proud that Bunaken Island has a resort of this standard, with all our ethical and eco policies. That pride extends to becoming proud of their island and having increased awareness to protect and preserve their environment.”

The couple do not believe that eco, ethical and luxury travel are mutually exclusive. Elaine continues, “An ethical resort should positively impact the surrounding environment and community. Without question, Oasis achieves that. Many resorts claim to be ethical, but they sometimes pay far less than minimum wage. We believe that giving people self-respect with a good job and proper salary, is a fundamental requirement of an ethical approach.

The whole of Oasis is luxury, from the guest cottages to the fresh water pool; from the organic toiletries to the gourmet restaurant. The dive operation is also a 5\* experience with large, comfortable boats, low diver numbers, fresh water deck showers with solar power for lighting and fresh water pumps, large towels, hot and cold drinks, snacks and flushing toilets. The jetty was built without cutting a single branch or damaging a single piece of reef, that is why it zig-zags along the natural tree line. There is also a large, fully kitted camera room and purpose-built spa onsite.

Bunaken Oasis Resort is a shining light in the eco-ethical-luxury diving tourism space and was selected by the OG PRISTINE SEE advisory committee as a finalist to win the 2018 Award for Excellence. [O](#)



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