

## 7 TOP GREEN DESTINATIONS

# Paradise found

**These seven slices of terrestrial paradise gracing our planet's green fortresses epitomise a more untamed aspect of nature.**

## • New Zealand

What makes New Zealand's natural heritage so special?

Underlying New Zealand's physical attractions—its dramatic mountains, unpolluted beaches and green countryside—is an epic survival story of unique plants and animals.

In total, around 30 percent of New Zealand's land area is protected conservation land.

In addition, research and management programmes have been introduced to aid the recovery of rare and endangered species like kakapo, kokako, kiwi and tuatara.

New Zealand welcomes everyone to experience and discover its unique and precious natural heritage.

New Zealand is a land of unique birds. The best known is the flightless kiwi, New Zealand's unofficial national symbol. Also flightless are the weka and the endangered kakapo, the world's largest parrot which can just scramble up into shrubs and small trees.

Unique flightless birds, the world's heaviest insect and a 'living dinosaur'. Eighty million years of isolation in a time capsule—the unique native wildlife of New Zealand...

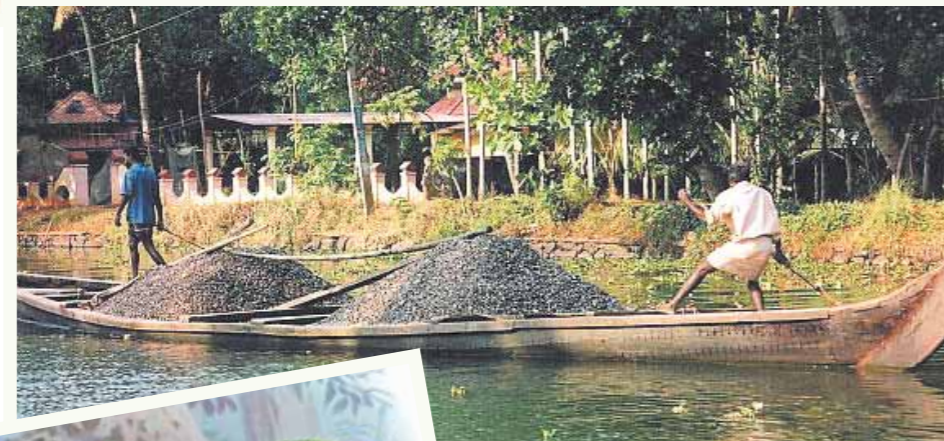
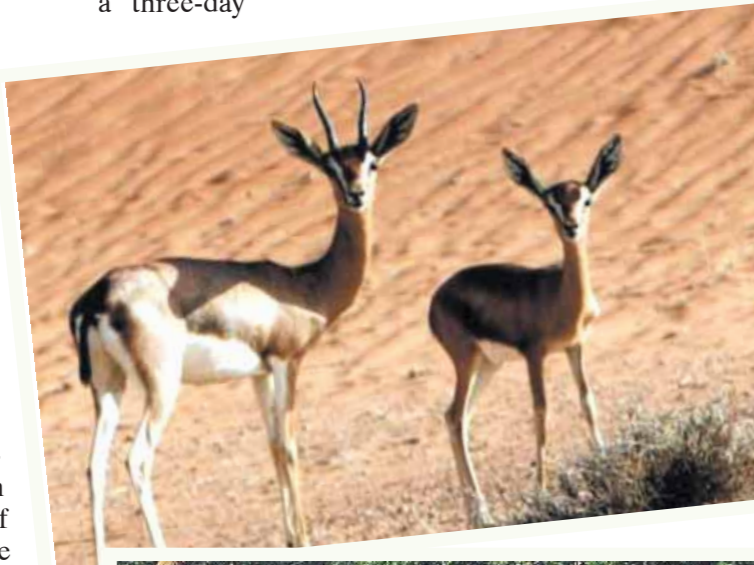
## • Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, UAE

More famous for its skyscrapers than for its environmental concerns, Dubai has evolved from a small Bedouin settlement to a bustling metropolis in a matter of decades. The closest you are likely to get to a wild animal here is to the snake-skin bags in the city's designer boutiques. But Dubai treasures its natural wealth. Established in 2003 in an aim to protect endangered species and preserve desert habitats, the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve takes up 5% of the Emirate's total land and care. Get in touch with the wild side of the desert through falconry and camel trekking, and enjoy the timelessness and silence of the desert while feasting

on a traditional Bedouin dinner at sunset. Visitors can spend the night at the Al Maha Resort a conservation-based sanctuary nestled in the heart of the nature reserve.

Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve showcased as eco-tourism model at United Nations conference

Leading environmentalists, academics, government officials and eco-tourism experts visited Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa yesterday, after a three-day



conference identified the award-winning property as the region's leading sustainable eco-tourism development.

## • Luang Prabang, Laos

Luang Prabang is an outstanding ex-

ample of the fusion of traditional architecture and Lao urban structures with those built by the European colonial authorities in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its unique, remarkably well-preserved townscape illustrates a key stage in the blending of these two distinct cultural traditions.

Steeped in history and rich in culture, it's one of the last travel frontiers with stunning natural beauty and in-



pay more for the innate pleasures of eating, drinking and sleeping than they would in the country's capital city Vientiane.

Cascading waterfalls, scaling peaks and the milky-brown waters of the Mekong River provide ample opportunity to swim, climb and sail your way through Luang Prabang. It is only as recent as 1989 that Laos opened up to tourism and the country that had previously been cut off from the rest of Southeast Asia developed a small but steady economy, based on tourism and regional trade. This small and gentle town where most locals are asleep by 22:00 is now one of the richest and most visited provinces in Laos. It's one of the few places where you feel that this is the genuine article and one that retains its unique ambience.

## • Kerala, India

The Marvel Called Kerala...

Wedged between the Western Ghats on the East and the Arabian Sea on the West, the narrow strip of land known as Kerala is a destination of a lifetime.

The timeless beauty of the palm fringed beaches of Kovalam and Varkala, the majesty of the undulating hills of Munnar and Vagamon, the serenity of the pristine backwaters of Kumarakom & Kuttanad and the enchanting woods and forests of Thekkady and Silent Valley will have you bowled over.

That such a small terrain can hold diverse geographical features and cul-



tures is a wonder in itself.

### What others say about Kerala

The National Geographic Magazine lists Kerala in the 'Ten Paradises of the World'

Kerala is truly the undiscovered India. It is God's own country and an enchantingly beautiful, emerald-green siver of land. It is a tropical paradise far from the tourist trial at the southwestern peninsular tip, sandwiched between the tall mountains and the deep sea. Kerala is a long stretch of enchanting greenery. The tall exotic coconut palm dominates the landscape.

There is a persistent legend which says that Parasuram, the 6th incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the Hindu Trinity, stood on a high place in the mountains, threw an axe far in to the sea, and commanded the sea to retreat. And the land that emerged all from the waters became Kerala, the land of plenty and prosperity.

Coasts covered with coconut palm trees, paddy fields and an emerald blanket enveloping the rolling hills as far as the eye can see make up the setting for India's most charming wildlife sanctuary. Tourists from all over the world come to see tigers, elephants and deer in Kerala's wildlife sanctuaries. Also, if you're lucky you might catch a glimpse of the goat-like Nilgiri Tahr, an endangered animal native to the region, in the Eravikulam wildlife reserve. Most recently rubber and tea plantations have opened their doors to tourists, offering a green gateway to estates established by Kerala's colonial rulers. The birthplace of Ayurveda, Kerala is without a doubt a centre of physical and spiritual healing.

## • Daintree Rainforest, Australia

The Daintree Rainforest north of Cairns in Tropical Far North Queensland Australia is one of the most diverse and beautiful examples of Mother Nature in the world. It is home to the largest range of plants and animals on earth, and all are found within the largest chunk of rainforest in Australia - an area spanning approximately 1200 square kilometres.

This World Heritage Listed area contains the highest number of plant and animal species that are rare, or threatened with extinction, anywhere in the world. The Daintree Rainforest is a unique area, precariously balanced between the advances of development and the warnings of environmentalists.

The Daintree Rainforest contains

30% of frog, marsupial and reptile species in Australia, and 65% of Australia's bat and butterfly species. 20% of bird species in the country can be found in this area. And it all lives in an area that takes up 0.2% of the landmass of Australia.

The Daintree Rainforest's addition to the World Heritage List in 1988 in recognition of its universal natural val-

mistake; if you want to be chewed on by a croc, chomped on by a snake or nibbled by a spider, the Daintree Rainforest could be just what you are looking for.

## • Kenya

Kenya lies astride the equator on the eastern coast of Africa. It is a medium-



ues highlighted the rainforest as being:

An outstanding example of the major stages in the earth's evolutionary history. An outstanding example of significant ongoing ecological and biological processes. An example of superlative natural phenomena, and containing important and significant habitats for conservation of biological diversity.

The Daintree Rainforest is over one hundred and thirty-five million years old - the oldest in the world. Approximately 430 species of birds live among the trees, including 13 species that are found nowhere else in the world.

For tourists, this unique corner of the world offers an outdoor holiday that few other places on the globe can match. There are hiking trails, scenic lookouts, camping sites, picnic tables and swimming holes to be explored in the Daintree. In addition, visitors to the area can stay in eco-friendly accommodation and eat at cafes and restaurants that specialise in local delicacies.

The Daintree has everything a wilderness lover can ask for. But the most important drawcard to the area is a product Australia is famous for: life-threatening flora and fauna. Make no

sized country by continental standards; covering an area of about 586,600km sq. Inland water bodies cover some 10,700km sq, the bulk of this in Lakes Victoria and Turkana.

Kenya is bordered by Somalia and the Indian Ocean to the east,

posed of beaches, coral cliffs and reefs, creeks and numerous offshore coral islands. Inland, a mainly level but narrow coastal plain lies on sedimentary rocks, with some igneous intrusions such as Dzombo and Mrima. Beyond low rolling hills lies the so-called Nyika Plateau, mainly on sedimentary rocks.

This landscape covers almost the entire northeastern sector of the country, on very gradual slopes.

The Great Rift Valley, with its associated escarpments and mountains, is a major feature. It runs the length of the country from Lake Turkana in the north to Lake Natron on the southern border with Tanzania.

The central portion of the rift is raised, with the Aberdare Mountains and Mt Kenya to the east and the Mau Escarpment and Cherangani Hills to the west. The northern and southern-most sectors of the rift are low-lying, arid and rugged, with spectacular volcanic landforms.

The region west of the central highlands is characterized by Precambrian metamorphic rocks and linear basement hills. Mt Elgon, an old, eroded volcano, intrudes through the ancient shield on the Uganda border. The lake Victoria basin generally has a gently sloping landscape and an eroded surface that exposes granitic outcrops.

Isolated hills and mountains, such as Mt Kulal, Mt Nyiro and Mt Marsabit, are scattered to the north and east of the central highlands. The Taita Hills, rising from the southeastern plateau, are ancient fault-block formation, the northernmost of a chain of isolated peaks (the 'eastern arc') that stretches south to Malawi through eastern and southern Tanzania.

They sit almost cheek-by-jowl with one of the region's recent volcanic ranges, the Chyulu Hills.

In recent years this wildlife has become a valuable asset, with many ranches now establishing guest houses, homestays and private camps within their boundaries. This has proven a great success, and many ranches now rely on a thriving tourist trade.

Importantly, community ranches have also formed. These are sanctuaries created by local communities, who have combined small scale farms and grazing land into large group ranches. Once again, the tourist trade has proved infinitely more profitable than agriculture or herding, and this allows them to use their traditional lands in a way that is sustainable and productive.

Significantly, they are conserving more than just wildlife, but also a way of life. These ranches have bolstered a sense of local identity and strengthened community ties. These community ranches are the best place in Kenya to learn more about traditional cultures and their role in modern world.

The result is an area of beautiful wilderness, where protected game roams freely and safely. Centred around the original Laikipia National Reserve, this area has become a sanctuary for Elephant, Lion, Leopard, Buffalo, and a wealth of plains game, including many endemic Northern species.



Ethiopia to the north, Sudan to the northwest, Uganda to the west and Tanzania to the south. The coastline, about 550km long, faces the Indian Ocean.

Kenya has tremendous topographical diversity, including glaciated mountains with snow-capped peaks, the Rift Valley with its scarps and volcanoes, ancient granitic hills, flat desert landscapes and coral reefs and islets.

However, the basic configuration is simple. Coastal plains give way to an inland plateau that rises gradually to the central highlands, which are the result of the relatively recent volcanic activity associated with the formation of the rift valley.

To the west the land drops again to the Nyanza plateau that surrounds the Kenyan sector of Lake Victoria; and to the north, to the rugged low country around Lake Turkana.

The coastline is broken and com-