

# Conservation dividend case study

## Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort, QLD



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Lady Elliot Island is a pristine coral cay within a green zone in the southern World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort is a world-leading, award-winning ecologically sustainable tourism operator dedicated to protecting and enhancing Lady Elliot Island and the Great Barrier Reef.

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort provides a nature-based destination giving visitors the opportunity to experience the fragile ecosystem of a coral cay in an economically and ecologically viable way.

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort has achieved Advanced Ecotourism Certification, Climate Action Leader Certification and Green Travel Leader status from Ecotourism Australia in recognition of its sustainability programs and low impact resort operation. Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort also achieved GreenLeaders status with TripAdvisor in 2015.

### Compatible with natural and cultural values

The 44 room eco-resort provides guests with a genuine eco-tourism experience. All accommodation options are designed to minimise the environmental impact on the island while enriching guests' experience of the diverse and abundant wildlife.

The resort footprint is less than 25 per cent of the island and the facilities are designed to immerse guests in the natural environment. The resort has no televisions,

telephones or radios in guest rooms and low wattage and baffled outdoor lights are used.

All vessels use jet motors to reduce impact and the island does not use single-use plastic items.

### Sustainable design and operation of facilities

The resort has almost reached its goal of 100% power by solar renewable energy.

The solar energy program has directly taken action against climate change with 550 litres of diesel fuel saved each day which equals 538 tonnes of carbon emissions saved per year.

Fresh water is produced by desalination plant and all water is reused for irrigation (no wastewater is discharged to the reef), after being treated by a waste water treatment plant. Water saving shower heads and taps are used in all accommodation.

The island has a strict policy to recycle and reuse products. Guests are required to sort rubbish during their stay on the island. All glass, aluminium, tin cans and general refuse is returned to the mainland for recycling where possible.

Currently, the resort composts all food waste (250kg per day) plus, cardboard and garden organic matter. The pasteurised compost is used in the resort gardens, nursery, airstrip and re-Greening Program. All waste oil

from the kitchen and machinery is collected in 200 litre drums and returned to the mainland for recycling.

The resort uses eco-friendly cleaning products, sugar cane toilet paper and locally sourced food under its sustainable purchasing policy.

## Stakeholders and community benefits

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort works with local community groups including Friends of the Coral Cays and local Landcare groups, Tangaroa Blue, Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef and Currumbin Wildlife Hospital.

The resort also supports groups that help others in need such as the Make-a-wish foundation, Marine Rescue Hervey Bay, Elliot Heads Surf Live Saving, Royal Flying Doctors Service, Cancer Council, Relay for Life etc.

## Education and advocacy

The resort also prides itself on educating guests about the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef and how to protect it; with over 30 guided activities including an Island Nursery Tour; Behind the Scenes Tour; Climate Change Trail; Guided Turtle Trek; Marine Debris Clean Up; Bird Watching Tour; Night Explorer Tour; Reef Walking; Historical Tour; and Manta Talk.

All tours are 'low impact' and the resort adheres to strict Great Barrier Reef Marine Park guidelines for all activities.

Research has shown that 77 per cent of guests surveyed after leaving the island reported that they had made positive behavioural changes as a result of their stay on the island.

## Conservation Dividend

In 2018, Lady Elliot Island was selected as the first 'climate change ark' through the Great Barrier Reef Foundation's Reef Islands Initiative. This initiative brings the resort, local businesses, Government, community and Traditional Owners together to fast-track the Island's restoration through on ground and in water actions.

The major project under the Reef Islands Initiative, is a large-scale 7-year Revegetation Program (2018 – 2025) to remove highly invasive introduced plants such as Lantana, Dragon fruit and Mother of millions and plant native coral cay species such as Pisonia trees, sand paper figs and native grasslands. The aim is to restore the natural cay ecosystem and create a diversity of habitats for migratory nesting seabirds and sea turtles.

To date 5.6 hectares have been revegetated with 3000 coral cay native trees, plants, ground covers and grasses.

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort staff participate in the Eye on the Reef monitoring and assessment program run by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The program enables anyone who visits the Great Barrier Reef to contribute to its long-term protection by collecting valuable information about reef health, marine animals and incidents.

The resort guests also have the opportunity to become 'Citizen Scientists' and undertaken marine surveys collecting information for the Reef Check marine monitoring database.

Lady Elliot Island is an important aggregation site for manta rays and is integral to the research undertaken by Project Manta, a multidisciplinary research program based at the University of Queensland.

The Project Manta team visit Lady Elliot Island several times a year. On these expeditions the team will conduct research which includes photographing, observing and recording manta ray behaviour. In the lab, they identify individual rays from photographs and enter the results in the database. They also collect samples of water and plankton and take oceanographic measurements of water currents, conductivity, temperature, and depth.

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort and **Greenfleet** have partnered to offset 100 per cent of carbon emissions from flights to and from the Island.

The resort requests that guests donate \$2.00 per person and matches this funding to ensure all flights (including staff and freight) are carbon neutral.

100 per cent of funds raised go directly to plant trees at the Barolin Nature Reserve, adjacent to the Mon Repos turtle rookery in Bundaberg. This site was chosen due to its significant role in the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem and lifecycle of turtles. The plantings protect the local sea turtle population forming a 'green curtain' to shield hatchlings from artificial light pollution in addition to improving the water quality flowing to the southern Great Barrier Reef.

Over time this partnership program has proven extremely effective and has grown to become the largest ever reforestation project in the region! Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort guest and company contributions has led to 11,500 trees planted at this site.

More recently, the resort has launched the new [Leaf to Reef: Biodiversity of Lady Elliot Island](#) research project, using citizen science to quantify the biodiversity of Lady Elliot Island and surrounding waters

