

Swell News for Christmas Island

A luxury eco-lodge has been approved inside the Christmas Island National Park, returning the remote, wildlife-filled Australian territory to the centre of attention for the right reasons after more than a decade of detention centre debacles.

Construction of Swell Lodge's solar-powered, glass-fronted eco-chalets along a 500m section of coastline will commence later this year, and is the first such eco-accommodation allowed inside any of the Commonwealth national parks which include Uluru, Kakadu and Norfolk Island. As Judy West, Acting Director of National Parks said, *"(The) eco-style accommodation will allow travellers to immerse themselves in one of Australia's most extraordinary national parks. Swell Lodge will be a win-win for Christmas Island National Park and tourism to the island."*

Christmas Island's annual red crab migration of 45 million land crabs - described by Sir David Attenborough as one of the "10 greatest natural wonders on Earth", still forces many of the island's roads to close temporarily each summer, during which time eco-lodge guests will have to walk the final section to their eco-chalets. "It's all part of the experience" says Swell Lodge owner and wildlife photographer Chris Bray "Imagine if you were lucky enough witness that!"

With the island's immigration detention slated to close and the phosphate mine drying up, the island's economy is shifting towards a more sustainable focus. Tourism numbers are on the rise, with the majority of visitors coming to experience the island's spectacular natural beauty. *"Swell Lodge has the potential to become one of Australia's most sought after eco-accommodations"* exclaims Lisa Preston, Chairperson of the Christmas Island Tourism Association.

Administrator of the Indian Ocean Territories, Barry Haase, says *"The Swell Lodge proposal by Chris and Jess starts a whole new chapter for visitors with a love of nature and the spectacular. Nestled in luxury between "Jurassic" like rainforest and dramatic seascape, guests deserve the ultimate bragging rights."*

Known as 'The Galapagos of the Indian Ocean', Christmas Island features diverse and unusual landscapes, blowholes and a variety of birdlife including tropicbirds, frigatebirds, brown and red-footed boobies and many endemic species including the Golden Bosun and endangered Abbott's Booby that nest nowhere else on Earth.



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"With no natural predators on the island," Bray explains, *"many of the birds just nest right on the ground and are completely unafraid – it's beautiful"*. An estimated 80,000 seabirds call Christmas Island home. The island also boasts world-class snorkelling and diving in crystal-clear, 28-degree water with coral reefs and drop-off walls, turtles, resident dolphins and, in the right season, manta rays and whale sharks.

No stranger to adventure, Chris Bray, together with his wife Jess recently became the first people to sail a junk-rigged sailboat through the Northwest Passage above Canada and Alaska in the arctic will be blogging about their behind-the-scenes experience of designing, building and operating this unique eco-lodge on their website www.SwellLodge.com. *"It'll be like the ultimate 'Grand Designs' project,"* Jess laughs, *"except here we can't just drive down to Bunnings if we forget something."*

In April 2016, Parks Australia put out a public call for 'Expressions of Interest' for commercial opportunities inside the Christmas Island national park, and the Bray's - who already run small-group, luxury photo tours around the world, including to Christmas Island – applied. *"A lot of work went into ensuring the design would have minimal impact"* Chris says, *"including being pole mounted and using modern, odourless composting toilets, as well as having an independent environmental impact assessment carried out involving ecologist site surveys both day and night."* Giving final approval from Parks Australia this week, Judy West says *"It has passed all the stringent environmental requirements to operate within the national park, and we look forward to sharing the world famous conservation values of Christmas Island with their guests."*

Discover Christmas Island before the rest of the world does.

FACT FILE

- Virgin Australia services Christmas Island, flying twice a week ex-Perth.
- A Garuda charter flight also services a Jakarta-Christmas Island-Jakarta route every Saturday.

Christmas Island – A Natural Wonder

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