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Portland Edition

March 2007



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Traveling for a World of Good



There are a lot of reasons to travel. We need to get away from our daily lives, so we look for ways to see and experience new things in our world.

We also hope to be able to relax, energize and/or renew ourselves in some way, so we look for places that make us feel like someone cares for our well being.

And, those of us who care about our environment, who try to be energy conscious and carbon neutral at home, are increasingly looking for travel options that allow us to extend our environmental practices on the road.

Eco-tourism is the answer. And in recent years, we don't even have to look very hard to find destinations that share our views. According to the International Ecotourism Society, the eco-tourism category grew three times faster than the rest of the travel industry in 2004.

There is even a new environmentally friendly resort on Oregon's remote south coast that is getting a great deal of media attention lately: WildSpring Guest Habitat, a small retreat-style resort overlooking the ocean in Port Orford, 60 miles north of the California border.

It was developed by Michelle and Dean Duarte who moved up from Los Angeles about four years ago to "get a life and make a living at the same time," quipped Dean, a carpenter, handyman and singer/musician.

"We wanted to create a place where people can escape from their 'real' world and surround themselves

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with natural beauty," says Michelle, a self-described recovering advertising executive. "We all live increasingly toxic lives – filled with physical and emotional toxins – that get in the way of our connection to whatever we find sacred. We live, work and travel in boxes that make us feel separated from nature, and I think our bodies and our souls are affected by that. We

wanted to create a peaceful, quiet place where natural beauty is honored and protected, where people could once again feel connected to the planet." "And then hopefully want to treat it better," adds Dean.

What they created was something unique in the travel industry that has given some reviewers a difficult time describing.

On five acres of secluded Native American grounds, it features five luxury cabin suites filled with art and antiques, with a Guest Hall designed for relaxing, gatherings and meals, where guests can whalewatch over breakfast, or help themselves to beverages, fruit and popcorn at any time. Plus an open air slate spa, walking labyrinth, meditation alcoves, hammocks and sculpture garden.

WildSpring combines many of the amenities and facilities of a luxury resort with the conveniences and privacy of an upscale vacation rental, with the natural environment and sacred space of a retreat center. It also offers occasional activities, workshops, classes and events associated with places like Esalen. And, it is committed to environmentally sensitive practices – both during its development and operations. They ask all guests to sign a Guest Agreement outlining their policies, inviting them to participate in their conservation practices.

When building WildSpring, they looked for responsible local contractors who would feel like they were working on their own neighborhood and impressed on them their intention to protect the property. All of their choices during development, including construction and decoration were made keeping in mind three questions. Will it be beautiful in a natural way? Will it make guests feel cared for? Will it help protect the environment?

"Part of our design concept here was to try to have everything guests see or touch be made of natural materials. We wanted to create an environment that felt organic, but

luxurious," Michelle said. "We paid attention to every detail and, rather than compromise development by having to make cheaper decisions, we stopped work until we had the money to proceed correctly."

One thing that also stands out here is the nature of the aesthetic. Many eco-facilities are rustic. Not at WildSpring.

Here, they have carefully created a very luxurious environment that is also eco-responsible and largely the result of recycling.

All of the wood furniture in the

cabins are vintage and antique pieces that they rescued from garage sales and restored, as are most of the lighting and decorative pieces. "Hollywood Hills garage sales are awesome," reports Dean. "Many of the people there are in the entertainment industry, and when they move it's because they are also moving up or down in their career and they want - or need - to get rid of everything they have. The cool thing is that they are so concerned with appearing needy, they price these things at pennies on the dollar. This may sound silly, but it enabled us to create luxurious surroundings that are both affordable and environmentally responsible."

Everywhere you look, guests see a perfect balance of art, natural beauty, and attention to detail. From the cedar shingles on the cabins, to



the lush fiddleback ferns, to carved wood benches, thick cotton spa robes, natural aromatherapy soaps, soy candles, handmade pottery in the Guest Hall, and sculptures everywhere, some elegant, some playful.

"We wanted to create the kind of place we'd enjoy staying in. We wanted to be surrounded by both nature and luxury. And felt there was no reason why people couldn't enjoy the best nature has to offer from the comfort of down filled duvets," says Michelle, laughing. "There is

something in human nature that notices on some level when everything is perfect. People are then able to relax, trusting that they are being well cared for."

Dean elaborates. "People come here tired and cranky, but by the morning, they come up to the Guest Hall for breakfast relaxed and smiling. They put recycled materials carefully in the proper bin, they smile at each other and mention how beautiful the trees are. WildSpring is one of those places that works its magic even when you're not looking."

Perhaps one reason for the growing popularity of ecotourism is the sense of connection it creates between the people visiting such a facility and the environment it seeks to protect. And, hopefully, this connection creates a world of good...one person at a time.

Recently opened, WildSpring has been named a Select Registry Inn, has received rave reviews in travel guides, newspapers and national magazines, and is a birding site on the new Oregon Coast Birding Trail. For more information, visit www.wildspring.com. See ad on page 20.



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