



# Natural selection

Opened in March this year, Indonesia's newest private island is a luxurious retreat with a bold green mission.

Rod Mackenzie reports

Viewed from aboard the resort's high-speed, custom-built motor launch, there's little to distinguish Cempedak (pronounced 'chem-pe-dak') from any of the other tiny, jungle-fringed islands scattered throughout Indonesia's Riau Archipelago. Sitting serene among the azure waters of the South China Sea, this 17-hectare sliver of unspoilt lushness rimmed with white, shell-strewn beaches firmly aims to keep it that way.

Minimising – if not eliminating – environmental impact lies at the heart

of this private island's ethos. After all, its wild inhabitants include a richly diverse collection that includes hornbills, eagles and kingfishers, plus the critically endangered pangolin and a family of adorable sea otters. Meanwhile soft coral gardens ring the island, and marine visitors include sea turtles, stingrays and seahorses.

Conserving this tropical idyll has led to pioneering sustainability methods – everything from food composting and solar hot water systems to supporting a local



community foundation that runs educational and business programmes. Unlike conventional hotel construction, Cempedak's development has been deliberately slow-paced, taking place over several years to prevent any damage to the ecology. The resort is also built and operated using local materials, labour and services, while almost 100 per cent of its supplies are bought in local markets and from small traders.

Only bamboo and local *alang-alang* grass have been used in the architecture of the 20 handcrafted, two-

storey villas, most of which enjoy direct access to the beach. Each of these airy, 150-square-metre cocoon-like structures comes with a beautifully sculpted spiral staircase that sweeps down to a large deck area with private plunge pool. Natural textures dominate the furnishings with traditional Indonesian textiles, recycled teak, lava stone and petrified wood all acquired from sustainable sources. Best of all, the only sound you hear is the ocean breeze rustling the palms and exotic birdsong; there are no televisions and no humming air-conditioning units, just

state-of-the-art bamboo fans that only spring to life when they sense a guest moving in the villa.

Another major draw is Cempedak's exclusivity. Not only does the island enjoy a wonderfully remote location (approximately two and a half hours' transfer via ferry, taxi and private launch from Singapore), but it's also restricted to adults only and a maximum of 40 guests can stay at any one time. For many, this represents a dream tropical escape – just don't let on to the children what they're missing. [cempedak.com](http://cempedak.com)

**Facing page:** Two thirds of Cempedak Island remains virgin rainforest. **Above:** The 20 bamboo-fortified villas are generously spaced over the island to offer maximum privacy