



MEDIA RELEASE – *For immediate release*

Assurance hard to come by in the Age of the Eco Tourist

Only a handful of luxury accommodation experiences in Australia have carefully crafted their natural balance to a level that deserves the ‘Advanced Eco Tourism’ certification. **Thala Beach Lodge** in tropical North Queensland, Australia is now one of them. It has achieved the highest available level in the International Ecotourism Accreditation Program, which uses goals originally drawn up by the **United Nations** itself.

The concept of eco tourism is largely misunderstood and in practice it is often abused, no more than ‘green packaging’ for the marketing of any tourism related to nature. This allows operators to sell destructive developments and wasteful practices that stifle the landscape and culture they claim to revere.

The Eco Certification doesn’t get given out easily. Thala has taken great pains to tread lightly on its surrounding habitats, forests and beach frontage near Port Douglas in North Queensland, Australia. The private beach is untouched and Thala’s magnificent 145 acre peninsular has six different habitats concentrated into this small area.

Ancient littoral rainforest, casuarinas and mangroves lap the beach, while dry eucalypt woodland, gallery forest and coconuts occupy the higher ground and inland creeks. Each habitat attracts its own unique species of flora and fauna, and Thala rests in between.

The **extensive accreditation process** Thala has gone through covers everything from responsible marketing and blanket environmental sustainability through to education,

working with local tribes who visit the site, and beyond. It establishes recognition in the tourism industry for genuine ecotourism and nature tourism operators and provides peace of mind to travelers who believe the natural state of their destination is a priority

“When we first came here I stood on this unique land and began to imagine what one day might be here. And I wanted to make the living ecosystem the centre of the experience,” says Rob Prettejohn.

“In many other of the world’s magical destinations you will find that over time just the opposite has happened.”

‘In places the whole ecosystem had to be rebuilt from the ground up...’



In the early 1970’s Thala’s owners Rob and Oonagh Prettejohn purchased the 145 acre Peninsula jutting out into the South Pacific where rainforest spills down from the Great Dividing Range.

At the time Thala had only 45 acres of original forest. The remaining land had been cleared years before and was a **degraded, unsustainable, near forgotten** sugar cane plantation.

Fortunately locals Rob and Oonagh had an affinity with the natural environment and took action, planting many thousands of indigenous plants to rehabilitate the area and return the land back to a wild natural state. Their philosophy enabled the potential of spectacular landscape to be fully realised.

Over 30 years Rob and Oonagh shepherded the re-establishment of complex forests on land that was once devastated. More recent years have been spent building Thala Beach Lodge into an internationally recognised luxury holiday experience. Wildlife populations from birds to lizards to native wallabies have returned and flourished on the site in abundance. Thala has come alive along with them.

“Australia has absolutely outstanding natural attractions and these ECO Certified operators are leading the way in giving international and domestic tourists a memorable experience of our unique natural heritage,” CEO of Ecotourism Australia Stephen Phal says.

“Their passion for the environment they are sharing with tourists gives these companies the edge in a competitive market.”

‘Visits from Elders of the Kuku-Yalanji Tribe bring the spirit of Thala to life...’

Thala Beach Lodge employs wildlife specialists who are on hand to guide and amaze guests in the forests, beaches and rocky headland. This is done in a personalised, quiet and unregimented fashion. Guests can enjoy the thrill of making their very own discoveries. They might see rare Snub-finned Dolphins, followed soon afterwards by a resident Osprey diving for fish to feed her chicks. Then, when delicately treading along sandy paths through the magnificent rainforest, encounter many species of tropical birds and butterflies.

Recognising the importance of the spirit of local indigenous communities **Thala invites the elders of the KuKu – Yalanji** community to take guests through the journey of their culture. From healing plants to bush food the elders bring in leaves and seeds for guests to handle, learn their history and relevant importance to their community. Musical instruments crucial to the rites and rituals of the ancient peoples of this ancient land are also part of the experience. In these ways Thala takes Eco Tourism to its peak.

For further information on Thala Beach Lodge

<http://www.thalabeach.com.au>

Print Ready images available for download at:

<http://www.thalabeach.com.au/press.htm>

For further information on Eco Accreditation

<http://www.ecotourism.org.au>

