

## top ten

## Eco-hostels

A stay at any of these eco-friendly hostels is practically carbon neutral. **Kitty Melrose** reports

## 1 Eco Inn, New Zealand

Situated on the edge of Egmont National Park on the west coast of North Island, this is the closest hostel to Mount Taranaki. Solar, hydro and wind powered, the property was built using wood and recycled materials and accommodation ranges from a basic bunk room to more private doubles. There's a rainwater drinking supply and you can cook an organic meal in the kitchen – just help-yourself to the farm garden. Along with a games room and library, you can also soak in the wood and solar heated outdoor tub with views out towards the Tasman Sea, which is lovely on a starry night. However, nothing beats the views from the summit of the dormant volcano, and you're also a short drive to ski slopes and the swell of the Taranaki Surf Highway. Stay in a bunk bed from US\$26 (Dh95) ([www.ecoinn.co.nz](http://www.ecoinn.co.nz); 0064 6752 2765).

## 2 Cabinas Tina's Casitas, Costa Rica

This is a cheap and functional but peaceful eco hostel in a quiet part of Santa Elena in Costa Rica. Stay in one of four wooden houses, with nine guest rooms in total, and enjoy views of the Monteverde mountains and the ocean from the patio and garden. As one recent guest put it, it's more about character than comfort – the rustic rooms are basic but decked out in handcarved furniture designed by Tina, the owner, and there is hot water – but no fridge in the shared kitchen. However, the location itself is quite special: from here go horseriding, take treks into Cloud Forest, or try zip-lining – whizzing by cable through the treetops. Tina also runs a reforestation project devoted to saving endangered local wildlife. The owners are wildlife fanatics and will happily take you on a tour. Doubles from \$10 (Dh40) per person, per night ([www.tinascasitas.de](http://www.tinascasitas.de); 00506 2 645 7241).



Courtesy Cabinas Tina's Casitas

## 3 Gyreum, Ireland

This hostel looks like a 100ft-wide UFO has landed in County Sligo's countryside. Solar and wind powered, it was built from renewable resources, including sheep wool insulation and unused timber, and was shortlisted for the 2007 Best Ecological Building in Ireland awards. Rainwater is collected in a huge tank and pumped back for use in showers and toilets.

The organic vegetable garden is manured from their neighbours' horse stables, most food offered comes from within a 7km area (sometimes by foot and bicycle) and scraps are fed to the animals next door. There's a choice of dorms, rooms and capsule tents set up in the hall on the geothermally heated flagstone floors. Visitors can sit by the open fire, enjoy a sauna and views of the mountains and lakes, go walking or surfing. Stay from \$23 (Dh84) per person, per night ([www.gyreum.com](http://www.gyreum.com); 00353 71 91 65994).



Ina Guehmann / Gyreum

## 4 HI-Washington DC, USA

Situated eight blocks from the White House, HI which stands for Hostelling International, is the only hostel in the world to be Energy Star certified for low energy consumption. The hostel features low-flow plumbing, energy-efficient lighting and there's a linen-reuse programme to conserve water. There are recycling centres on each floor for everything from glass and paper to batteries and plastic. All paper used at the hostel is made from at least 95 per cent recycled materials. There are 250 beds, in various-sized rooms, and they're currently renovating them using low VOC paint and carpet made from recycled materials – of course. Add to that a self-service kitchen, and TV room, along with internet access and organised tours – both free. They also host monthly documentary movie nights on environmental topics. Stay from \$27 (Dh100) per night ([www.hiwashingtondc.org](http://www.hiwashingtondc.org); 001 202 737 2333).



Courtesy HI Washington

## 5 Kasbah du Toubkal, Morocco

This restored kasbah, nestled in the beautiful Atlas Mountains, has won awards for sustainable tourism. There is no road up there: you walk for 10 minutes and your bags are taken up by mule. Run by the Berbers who helped to rebuild it, the retreat is two hours from Marrakech, and referred to as a 'Berber Hospitality Centre'. The Berbers believe that the mountains should be accessible to all, so rooms range from palatial suites to dorms. A supplementary charge funds community projects for local villages and a new school for girls is currently being built. Life here revolves around guided walks, a hammam and taking mint tea on the rooftop with views of Mount Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa. Dorm beds cost \$54 (Dh200) per person, with breakfast ([www.kasbah-dutoubkal.com](http://www.kasbah-dutoubkal.com); 00212 5 49 05 01 35).



Courtesy Kasbah du Toubkal

## 6 Hostel Lullu Lama, Ecuador

Composting toilets, homemade organic produce and its own waste water filter system: this converted farmhouse located high up in the Andes, 70 miles from Quito, could teach anyone a thing or two about being eco-conscious. "We also try to let the community benefit from us being here," says owner Jean Brown. That includes an extensive recycling programme (the village has no garbage collection), buying locally, and encouraging guests to do the same. Choose between private double rooms or dorm beds. The area itself offers hidden trail valley tours up the paramo to see the cloud forest and volcanoes, for example; horse-riding, expansive views, a natural swimming pool, and peace and quiet. Stay in a dorm for \$18 (Dh66) per night, including a three-course meal and breakfast ([www.lullullama.com](http://www.lullullama.com); 00593 3 2814 790).



Courtesy Hostel Lullu Lama

## 7 Loch Ossian Youth Hostel, Scotland

This 20-bed hostel in the Scottish Highlands has been doing its bit since the Scottish Youth Hostels Association, which has owned it for 75 years, gave it a makeover. A former boathouse, it's now wind and solar powered and bat-friendly paint is used to protect the bat colony roosting in the hostel's attic. There are dry toilets, which don't require flushing, and a natural reed-bed filtration system to purify waste water. Food waste is also used as mulch for planting new trees, and a multi-fuel stove provides heat and hot water. The accommodation consists of two dorms for eight and twelve people. What's more the location by Loch Ossian high on Rannoch Moor, with its many walking routes, is beautiful, perfect for seeing wildlife and can only be reached by train. Stay for \$20 (Dh75) per night ([www.syha.org.uk](http://www.syha.org.uk); 0044 1397 732 207).



Courtesy Loch Ossian Youth Hostel

## 8 Rosalie Forest Eco Lodge, West Indies

While backpacking in the Caribbean, Jem Winston's dream was to return and create a sustainable eco-tourism project that protected and enhanced the environment and the local community. In keeping with that goal, his lodge is run entirely from hydro and solar power, waste is composted, water goes through grease traps to be re-used in the garden, and campers use dry toilets. It's back-to-nature – choose from a hammock, camping, more comfortable jungle cabins or a dorm bunk. After a hike, horseriding, or a spot of turtle-watching, everyone dines together. Winston organises sustainable living workshops and tours. Stay in a dorm beds for \$25 (Dh92) per night ([www.rosalieforest.com](http://www.rosalieforest.com); 001 767 446 1886).



Courtesy Rosalie Forest Eco Lodge

## 9 Hedonisia Hawaii, USA

Hedonisia Hawaii gets full marks for its eco-friendly and innovative sleeping arrangements: an old school bus sleeps four, or you could stay in the tractor left on the property by the previous owner. Tents are also set up in the barn. The property is spread over nearly four acres in the tropical rainforest on Big Island, near the town of Pahoa. The hostel's needs are largely met by a geothermal power plant nearby. There's an eco-friendly 'toilet with a view' which looks out over the jungle. Add to that wifi, movies and an outdoor shower and, as the website says, it's jungle style but not roughing it. Sleep in dorm tent in the barn for \$20 (Dh73) per night ([www.hedonisiahawaii.com](http://www.hedonisiahawaii.com); 001 808 430 2545).



Courtesy Hedonisia Hawaii

## 10 Urbany Hostel, Spain

The Urbany Hostel in central Barcelona is a hip, 13-floor property which opened in July. The designers looked at innovative ways to respect and protect the environment: they used a noise absorbing façade; installed a rain water harvesting system; and low energy consumption lamps; and the hostel recycles and reuses 50 per cent of its water. Enjoy an all-you-can-eat breakfast (included in the price) on the huge sun terrace, as well as other unexpected extras, such as free entrance to use the 25m pool, gym and sauna, and a trendy bar. Plus the dorms – with 400 beds – are ensuite, with lockers, air conditioning and complimentary wifi. A dorm bed costs from \$16 (Dh60) per night ([www.barcelonaurbany.com](http://www.barcelonaurbany.com); 0034 93 2458414).



Courtesy Urbany Barcelona