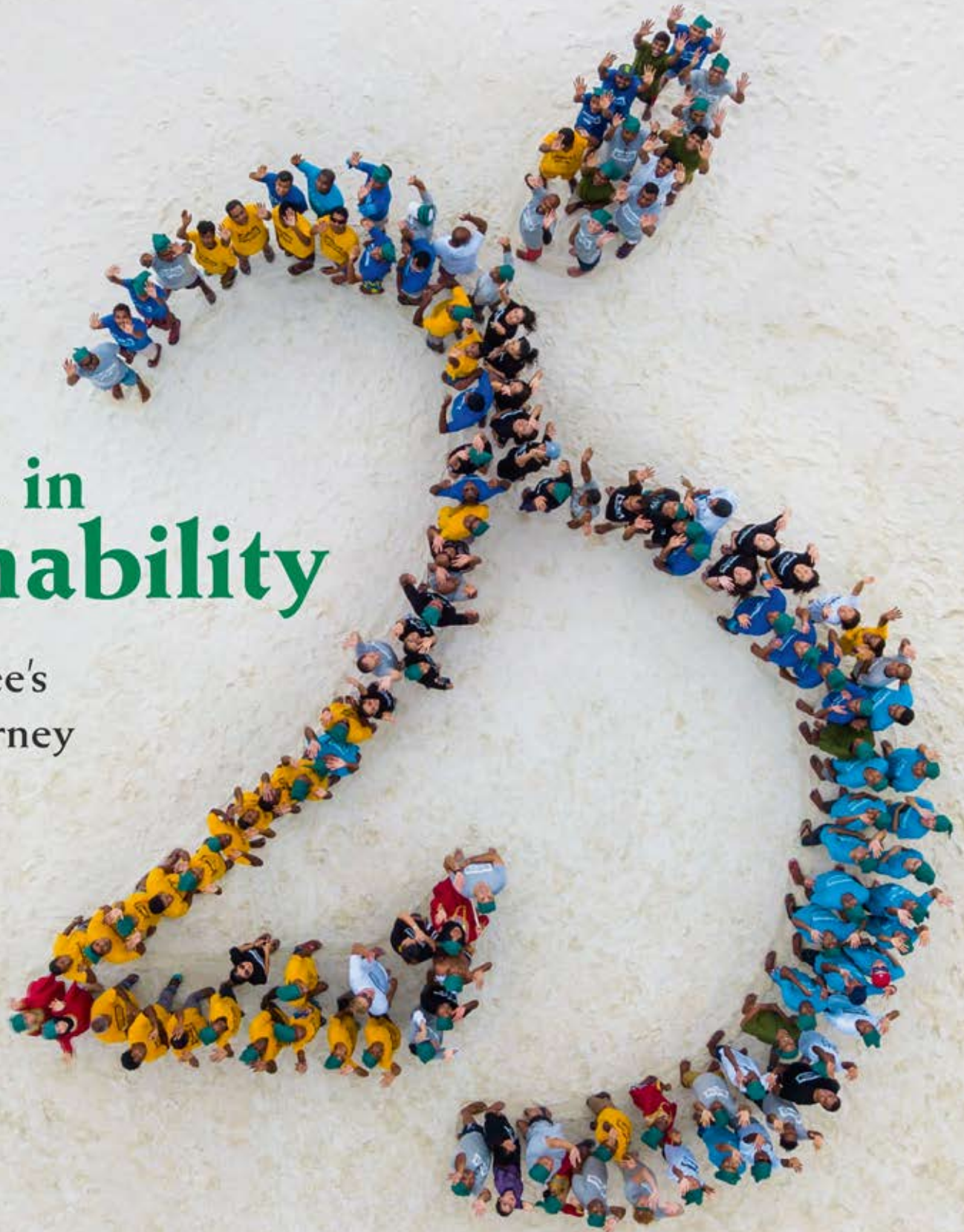
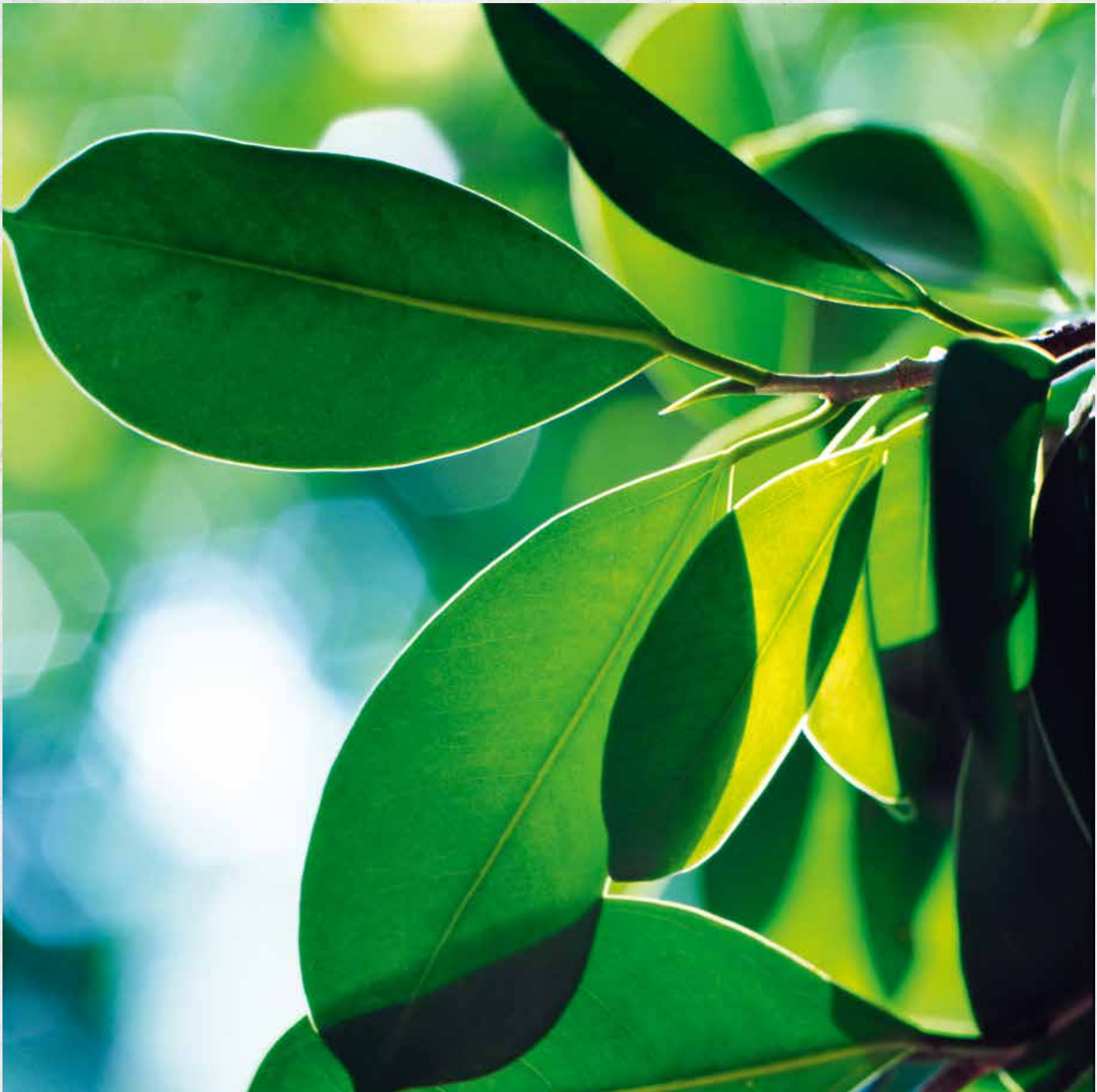


Rooted in Sustainability

Banyan Tree's
25-Year Journey



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Foreword

CLAIRE CHIANG

Co-founder and Senior Vice President, Banyan Tree Holdings
Chairperson, Banyan Tree Global Foundation

Banyan Tree's story is one of transformation: a promise that became our commitment, turning an idea into an ideal. It defines not only the journey of Banyan Tree as a company, but the realisation of a concept that at first unbeknown to myself and my husband Kwon Ping (KP), became intertwined with our vision for the brand through an organic process of developing our own values and beliefs: tourism as a powerful force for driving positive change in this world.

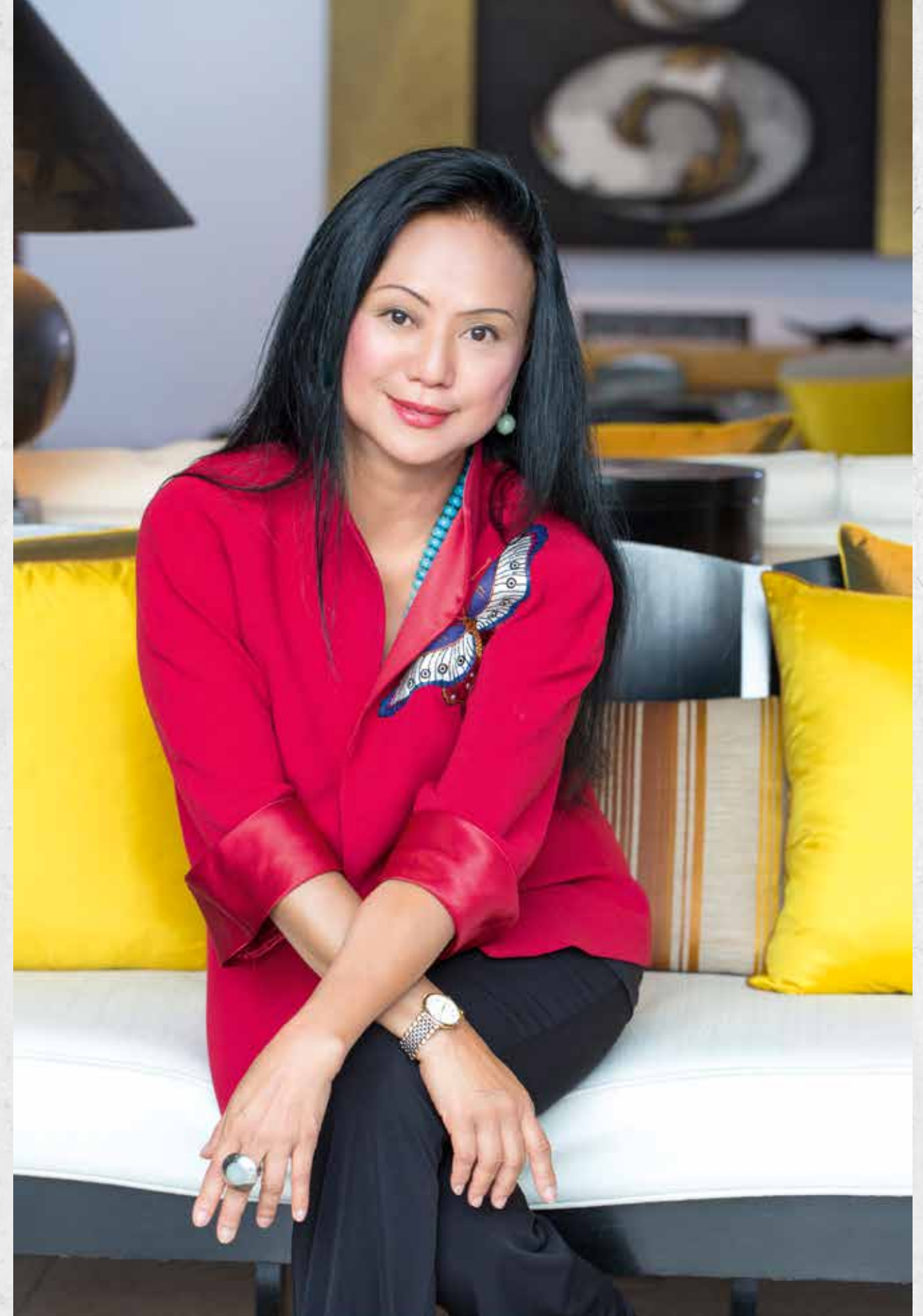
When KP and I first set out, there were no formal guidelines governing how to develop or operate sustainably in hospitality. We did not consider ourselves environmentally conscious, we just thought that if we were going to build this resort, we had to build it responsibly. We had to respect the land and its people, and find a way of working and operating in harmony with our surroundings whilst prospering.

Things have come a long way since. We did not approach these past 25 years as philanthropy; simply, we want to be a business that encourages stewardship of the resources we are given in a responsible way, to promote and protect cultural heritage, empower women and equip local artisans with meaningful livelihoods.

We started by planting one tree; it became the first of half-a-million planted worldwide, and as Banyan Tree continues to grow and spread its roots, we look to inspire the next generation of leaders—ambassadors at every level, congruent in the execution of our collective beliefs and commitment to this philosophy. Conserving whilst we develop, creating exquisite hubs for experiential learning. This is a systematic and conscious choice; development as a long-term stakeholder investment strategy, creating value for our communities.

It was an emotional connection with a piece of land that led to the genesis of Banyan Tree's legacy—a legacy of pride and giving, a heritage of values built upon the contribution of thousands of associates. Travellers today like to leave a destination with experiences that touch their hearts, their souls; and which makes them see their own lives in a different way.

Banyan Tree continues to drive what we consider as emotional responses and connections; we strive to deliver exceptional experiences anchored by strong narratives. This book documents part of a wondrous 25-year journey that I think all Banyan Tree associates and stakeholders should be proud of. I thank each and every one of them!





Foreword

HO KWON PING

Co-founder and Executive Chairman,
Banyan Tree Holdings

My wife Claire and I embarked on this journey to create some meaning and purpose in everything that we did. Being in the resort business, simply by existing in some of these developing countries, we were able to contribute to the development of the communities around us.

But Banyan Tree has always looked to go beyond simply existing; we endeavour to embrace exotic destinations and enhance people's lives. Despite being somewhat founded upon a chance encounter, it was through our clear vision to grow and nurture something small, whilst delivering excellent service and creating unique lifelong memories, that paved the way for one resort to become three, then eight, then ten, and since, many more.

From the start we looked to create a glass that is half-full, positioning ourselves in the tourism industry as agents of positive change, rather than being sources of friction on society. I believe we succeeded—all of us collectively, as an independent company, not owned by a huge conglomerate. We are a strong brand rooted in Asia, united through diversity, true to the original values that underpin our growth. I am most proud of these values, recognised by all our associates and truly embedded in Banyan Tree's culture.

Our strong core of younger people really believe in the Banyan Tree philosophy, values that I believe are more evocative amongst the younger generations than perhaps for my generation and those before. All the work we are doing, particularly in environmental and social responsibility depends on our associates; if everybody can understand that, then the service culture becomes incredibly strong. As a family of 11,000 we serve a million guests every year with passion and pride; Banyan Tree is the culture, hopes and dreams of our people. Their stories have become part of our lives, and we look to take care of our own.

One thing I have learnt in this time is the importance of resilience. To me, legacy is about whether you have given what you have built a solid foundation to grow beyond your wildest dreams. We are excited and committed to growing our brands rapidly, while strengthening our ability to embrace change and innovation in the ever-evolving hospitality industry.

Over the years we have strived to create more than just a hotel group; we created a stage for talents to grow, a home to nurture families—a thriving community. It makes me most happy that the majority of our associates that I meet really treat Banyan Tree as their home. My message to them is: continue treating it as your home, love it, take care of it, and everything else will follow. I feel a deep sense of gratitude to all the associates who have made Banyan Tree what it is today.



Introduction

When Ho Kwon Ping and Claire Chiang embarked on the challenge to construct an ambitious alternative to a holiday villa in Phuket, it was clear to the couple that they wanted to create more than a luxury hotel brand or resort chain—what they sought to achieve was a projection of their cherished passions, values and beliefs. In their minds lay a vision to enhance and empower the lives of others while embracing and preserving the beauty they saw everywhere. The duo seized an opportunity to redirect returns from the traditional family agribusiness that traded in starch products, and bring their imagination to life.

At that point in the late 1980s, “sustainable development” was not a term commonly used within the hospitality industry, but it was clear, even from the very start, that Banyan Tree’s unique flagship property at the site of Laguna Phuket would blaze a trail for what sustainability would come to mean. It represented the beginnings of an original brand whose philosophy was rooted in far more than just travel, and that would come to reshape industry and societal norms.

The first obstacle in the ambitious undertaking was to remediate an old, disused tin mine in Bang Tao Bay, Phuket, and the vast surrounding land it occupied, that had been determined by the United Nations to be unfit for development. One of the first projects was to plant thousands of trees in the arid land and detoxify the stagnant lagoons in order to let life wash back into the bay.

At a time when much of Asia was reeling from the effects of an economic downturn, Banyan Tree tapped on the distinctively pan-Asian identity of its multi-national workforce and harnessed the power of unity in diversity. Amidst global crises, Banyan Tree encouraged strength among its stakeholders and demonstrated its resilience as both a business and a brand. The company grew and flourished as the years went by, pushing more boundaries beyond tourism, leisure and adventure. New properties were launched in relatively unfamiliar destinations around the world; pioneering trademark concepts—such as the pool villa—were initiated, and signature retail segments—the Banyan Tree Spa and Gallery—were introduced. These innovations quickly spread to other hotel and resort groups, becoming both trademarks of the Banyan Tree brand and benchmarks in the hospitality industry.

Above all else, Banyan Tree accredits much of its success to its thriving community of stakeholders, comprising loyal associates and devoted leaders. These ambassadors of the brand share and believe in the same vision, of embracing and enhancing the world around them, and are empowered to act as stewards of positive change.

The banyan tree is one of the most venerated trees in Asia. It can live for centuries, standing firmly, resilient against time and tide, a symbol of constancy in an ever-changing world. Each root holds a memory of a time gone by. This commemorative book traverses the emotional architecture underpinning Banyan Tree’s successful 25-year journey. It unveils some of the humble faces that make up the Banyan Tree family and showcases gratifying accounts of those whose lives have been made better by the organisation’s core philosophy: Embracing the Environment, Empowering People.

Our Journey



1987

Laguna Phuket, Thailand opens, Asia's first and largest integrated resort. A veritable haven built on the previously abandoned wasteland of an old tin mine.



1987

Laguna Childcare Centre operates from a shipping container, providing a safe place for children of construction workers to learn.



1992

Laguna Phuket awarded American Express and International Hotel Association Environmental Award for rehabilitating and transforming a site previously written off as a toxic wasteland into a lush tropical garden.



1993

Laguna Childcare Centre officially opens its doors to children of associates and the local community.



2006

Banyan Tree is a founding member of Singapore Compact for Corporate Social Responsibility with Claire Chiang starting a four-year term as inaugural president. Later that year Banyan Tree is one of 10 founding signatories launching the United Nations Global Compact in Singapore.



2006

Banyan Tree publishes its first annual sustainability report. Banyan Tree launches its inaugural group-wide initiative to promote Earth Day across its resorts.



2005

The Asian Tsunami Recovery Fund (ATRF) and Phuket Tsunami Recovery Fund (PTRF) are launched in early January to assist in the recovery and rehabilitation efforts in Phuket, Maldives, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka following the Indian Ocean tsunamis of 26 December 2004.



2004

Banyan Tree formalises its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Committee to oversee the use of the GIF and direct the group's socially responsible practice and ethos.



2003

The Banyan Tree Maldives Marine Lab is launched, opening in early 2004 as the first resort-based research and educational facility in the Maldives, that promotes marine conservation.



2002

Banyan Tree opens its first urban environment hotel in Bangkok and converts some car parking areas to urban oases featuring vegetation, aquatic life and avian life.



2001

Green Imperative Fund (GIF) is established that matches donations from guests to promote efforts and initiatives embracing the environment and empowering people.



1996

The first Banyan Tree Gallery opens in Phuket, Thailand as a retail outlet showcasing indigenous crafts for guests. Banyan Tree Gallery's roots reach back to 1989 when Claire Chiang is approached to purchase two "maun" triangular cushions in support of the Yasothorn community in Northeast Thailand.



1995

Banyan Tree expands developments into two new countries – Vabbinfaru, Maldives, is built with careful consideration for the island's fragile coral, and Bintan, Indonesia, follows a careful development strategy to protect the virgin hillside rainforest.



1994

Banyan Tree brand launched with opening of flagship property at Laguna Phuket.



2007

Banyan Tree launches Seedlings to support and empower young people through education.

Greening Communities is launched to raise awareness of climate change.



2007

The Banyan Tree Bintan Conservation Lab opens as the group's first terrestrial and marine research and education facility in South East Asia.



2008

The Sichuan Recovery Fund is launched to support long-term recovery for communities affected by the May 2008 earthquake centred in Wenchuan County, Sichuan.



2009

Banyan Tree Global Foundation is established as a separate entity to enhance governance and institutionally safeguard GIF collected funds for social and environmental efforts.



2013

Seedlings Café opens in Hoi An, Vietnam, leveraging Laguna Lang Co's restaurant expertise to operate as a social enterprise providing vocational training for at risk young adults.



2014

Banyan Tree celebrates 20 years of responsible tourism and sustainable development.

Build for Good and Stay for Good frameworks are launched.

Seedlings Café Phuket begins training of young adults.



2015

Cleaning initiative commences group-wide, supporting group goals to restore and cleanse.



2018

First Banyan Tree CSR Champions Meeting held in Phuket.

Banyan Tree celebrates group-wide International Year of the Reef.

Banyan Tree announces its commitment to eliminate single-use plastic.



2019

25 schools supported across the world and Greening Communities reaches half-a-million trees planted.

Banyan Tree wins Global Compact Sustainability Award.

Banyan Tree celebrates its 25-year journey and Banyan Tree Global Foundation celebrates a decade of support for Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts.



2020 and beyond

Banyan Tree to continue its commitment towards climate change action by continuing its drive towards zero carbon, eliminating single-use plastics, and increasing impact through strategic engagement of stakeholders and suppliers.



A Seed

is
Sown





“They said it would be impossible to recover the area, but after the hotel construction and planting of the trees and grass, **we brought the colour and life back to the area again.**”

PRASERT CHOOWONG
Land Guard, Banyan Tree Phuket

A Most Incredible Moonscape



to Phuket in the late 1980s looking for a small piece of land to build a summer house—a tropical retreat from their urban lives in Singapore. Having found something suitable, they continued along the beach, only to chance upon “a most incredible moonscape”, KP remembers, with a strange allure to it. On a whim, they enquired after the owner of the land—leading them to a tin miner, who was more than happy to get it off his hands. The rest, as they say, is history. KP jests, “Up until now, that other small piece of land is still vacant ... I still haven’t built my summer house.”

As Banyan Tree Phuket’s official Land Guard, Prasert Choowong’s job title is not one that is likely to pop up on a regular job search portal. It is as unique as his involvement with the group that he has spent over 30 years with. At 67, he has lived through some large changes in Bang Tao Bay, Phuket. His early career began in the very tin mines that were responsible for the degradation of the area—in fact, he worked in the mine that once sat in the heart of the main lagoon, directly opposite the site of the Dusit Thani, the first hotel ever built in Laguna, and next to where the Laguna Resorts & Hotels offices are now located. His journey with Banyan Tree began even before the Ho family acquired the land on which the flagship property was built. Known for his dedication, loyalty and a willingness to assist however he can, Khun Prasert is one of many unassuming people who have played important roles in the story of Banyan Tree.

Claire, Kwon Ping (KP), his brother Kwon Cjan (KC) and their cousin Chiu Ping Yuen had come

KC, Managing Director of Design Services for Laguna Resorts & Hotels, remembers standing on the thousand-acre site for the first time, repeatedly asking his brother where he thought the boundaries were. Equally mystified, KP could only reply, “Well, damned if I know.” KC joked about making the decision for where the first hotel should be built, saying he might as well have blindly pushed a pin into a map. It was in fact Khun Prasert who then came to their rescue, and was able to identify all the boundary markers of the land title deeds. He coordinated with the owner and local community members to confirm these boundaries, no small task at a time when most people were not equipped with mobile GPS devices or smart phones.

Left: Once devoid of life and part of a tin mine, the lagoon in front of the Laguna Phuket offices looks like a picture postcard today. *Above:* Prasert Choowong has spent over three decades with Banyan Tree.

Boundaries now defined, the investors and soon-to-be developers realised their “incredible moonscape” needed considerable effort, and capital, just to restore its health enough to plant a few trees. “We did not read the 1977 UN report that declared the land useless and unfit for development. We did not do our homework,” admits Claire. As architects and construction workers began efforts to design and build the resort, environmental experts and a team of gardeners were brought in to bring Bang Tao Bay back to life. Plant species such as pinewood and eucalyptus were specifically chosen for being fast growing and responding well to the site’s pedological and climatic conditions. Before any trees could be planted, vast amounts of fertiliser and soil needed to be worked into the dry, arid sand that dominated the landscape. Aptly, the first tree on the site was planted by Khun Prasert, in his new role as gardener for Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts. Proudly, he reflects, “That tree is now over 30 years old, in the plot where Cassia now sits.”

It is hard to imagine that the deep blue lagoon topped with water lilies, surrounded by trees and soundtracked by birdsong was once a dry, sandy basin ravaged by a tin mine and devoid of life. Khun Prasert smiles and says, “They said it would be impossible to recover the area, but after the hotel construction and planting of the trees and grass, we brought the colour and life back to the area again.”

The story of how KP and Claire came to acquire an abandoned tin mine has become legend in the Banyan Tree Group, demonstrating the conceptual values that underpin Banyan Tree and which have allowed it to take root, branch out and blossom. The brand’s origin story has given life and authenticity to the organisation, defining the latter from its earliest days.



From the onset, mistakes were made and lessons were learned—such as KP and Claire failing to do the homework on the land they purchased—but the neophytes’ vision and determination drove them forward to create more than a tourist attraction or a means of livelihood. Instead, they created a thriving, organic community.

In 1992, Laguna Phuket was awarded the prestigious American Express and International Hotels Association Environmental Award for its commitment to enhancing the environment. The award was a significant achievement and the first of many, to give credibility to the values underpinning Banyan Tree’s sustainability ethos.

The daring decision that was Laguna Phuket had certainly paid off. Only three months after opening the first hotel, Dusit Thani, in 1987, American investors came knocking at the door. KC remembers: “Hyatt and Sheraton were eager to manage our next hotels, so it did pay off. It established our seriousness and our capability.” Backed by this rewarding experience of remediating Bang Tao Bay, Banyan Tree soon launched the company’s own international hotel brand, opening its flagship property, Banyan Tree Phuket, in 1994.

Both KP and Claire are modest in their claim that it was not only their “youthful hot-headedness” that helped them to defy odds and realise their dream’s full potential. It was thanks to the people who contributed towards this vision and the creation and construction of Laguna Phuket. With conviction, they refer to these emissaries as stakeholders.

The transformation of Bang Tao Bay is apparent in this series of before and after pictures between 1992—with remediation first underway—and 2005, with life having returned to Laguna Phuket.



Above: Construction underway for Dusit Thani, the first hotel in Laguna Phuket. KC (top left) overseeing construction. Right: Associates of Angsana Zuhai paying a visit to community stakeholders, who include local elders.


Diversity forms a core part of the brand's identity and is **woven into the fabric of associates' daily lives.**



Stakeholders versus Shareholders

The concept of stakeholders versus shareholders is imperative. It enforces the notion that not owning actual shares does not remove the vital stake people have in the welfare of the company. Stakeholders include employees, suppliers, customers and the community within which the company operates. Banyan Tree further employs the term “associates”—evoking a sense of respect and camaraderie—for the many individuals comprising its dedicated workforce. To KP, it's clear why they are stakeholders: “People have asked me about the key factors of our success, and there's lots of reasons ... but if I had to identify a single factor, I would say without a doubt, I think it is the people.”

Banyan Tree introduced the spa concept into the Maldives, offering a true hideaway for those looking to escape to this uncharted tropical paradise. Spa therapists originating mostly from Thailand or Indonesia, where Banyan Tree set up its two Spa Academies to develop skills and provide exciting careers for locals, brought diversity to the Maldivian workforce. As a global brand now found in over 30 different countries and comprising associates from more than 50 countries, diversity forms a core part of the identity and is woven into the fabric of associates' daily lives.



“When I was 12 years old, my elder brother and I delivered lunch boxes to our parents who worked at the tin mine. After the tin mining stopped, the mine was left behind and the land became deserted with many holes. In 1987, this waste land was developed and became a resort for foreigners and Thais. **In the 15 years I have worked here, my life has changed so much.** I have a house, a car, some savings and a job.”

SUDA KAHAPANA
Staff Canteen Attendant, Banyan Tree Phuket

Enabling Communities

As a responsible business, supporting long-term societal prosperity is central to Banyan Tree's vision. It is committed to creating value for whole communities—employees, customers, community neighbours and business partners—through employment and job creation, but it has also gone beyond this. Banyan Tree has tapped on the strengths of changing markets and shifting traditional practices, identified areas of aligned interest with the community and worked with partners towards international Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address people, prosperity, peace and partnership. This has enabled communities to thrive and flourish alongside the Banyan Tree Group.

Earning trust and support from local communities is an important, yet often overlooked, element of sustainable development and holistic growth, especially for large-scale projects in principally

underdeveloped areas. Small, close-knit communities want to have their voices heard and their interests and needs considered. Associates like Khun Prasert play an important role in mediating the link between these communities and the Banyan Tree brand. Khun Prasert admits there were challenges in the past, but from the very beginning, Banyan Tree has demonstrated its commitment towards supporting local communities and defending local values and ecosystems. Twenty-five years later, this continues to be true.



Above: Laguna Phuket was awarded the IHA Environmental Award in 1992. Right: Khun Lin, Caddy No.1 for the past 28 years at Laguna Phuket.



“

I grew up near these tin mines, my parents both worked in them. I joined Banyan Tree in 1991 as a Golf Caddy. Even though I was one of the last to apply, they assigned me as Caddy No.1. **The first time I ever took a guest around the golf course I was very nervous, but I continued to learn and my confidence grew,** and now 28 years later I am still Caddy No.1 and have made many happy memories with the company and met lots of wonderful people.

KHUN LIN

Caddy No.1, Laguna Golf Club

A Safe Place to Learn

In the early stages of Laguna Phuket's development, Claire noticed how the children of construction workers on the site had nowhere safe to play. She commissioned a small shipping container to serve as a temporary childcare centre for these families, as well as for children from the local community.

After construction of Laguna Phuket was complete and workers moved away, empty spaces at the childcare centre were offered to the children of associates and from the community, with children from low-income families given priority. Now established as Laguna Phuket Kindergarten (LPK) under guidance from the Ministry of Education, it is widely acknowledged as one of the best in Thailand, and relocated to its current site in 2001, set beside a small river meandering between the lagoons and luxurious Banyan Tree residences—a peaceful place for children to learn and grow.

More than 1,000 students from the communities around Banyan Tree have benefitted from the school. Some of these children are now employed by the hotels in Laguna Phuket and send their own children to the kindergarten.

Principal Aranya, who taught there when it was just a shipping-container in a dusty carpark three decades ago, says that members of the community “really feel that Laguna Phuket gives them a better life, a better opportunity for their children. They do not see us as the foreign investors anymore, because we are giving back to them.” The kindergarten provides a crucial link between Laguna Phuket and the local communities surrounding it.

Aranya always dreamed of being a teacher, and looked past the conditions under which she first taught, focusing on her belief in empowering young children through education. “I knew I had the full support of the owners and was just happy teaching the children.”

LPK is an example of how fulfilling a need can create additional value to a community, provide a crucial link between a business and the local communities surrounding it and grow into a powerful force for good. Associates working for Laguna Phuket are provided not only with a place to work, but somewhere safe and convenient to leave their children during the day, enabling them to focus on their careers and lives.

Opposite and right: Laguna Phuket Kindergarten outing to a local Thai farm to learn about traditional ways of life, such as playing Mak Khom and tapping rubber trees.



Forging New Paths

After achieving success as Asia's first and largest privately owned integrated resort, Banyan Tree began sprouting new branches, dangling its roots into the unknown and laying new paths for intrepid travellers.

Perhaps as a throwback to KP and Claire's own adventurous days as backpackers, Banyan Tree began opening unique hotels in relatively unexplored parts of the world and brought innovative ideas to already popular destinations. Each property and location was specifically picked to showcase new opportunities and designed to uphold the founding couple's core values of embracing local cultures, traditions and landscapes.

Only a year after opening its flagship property in Phuket in 1994, Banyan Tree opened two new properties. Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru became the first international five-star, luxury brand to enter the Maldives market, spurring what would become

A spectacular aerial view of Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, the first five-star luxury resort to enter the Maldives market.

one of the greatest luxury tourism development rushes any small island nation has seen, with hundreds of four- and five-star properties now opening across the archipelago each year. Banyan Tree also became the first international hotel brand to open its doors to adventure-seekers on the quiet fishing island of Bintan, Indonesia.

Groundbreakers and pioneers in any industry would understand how being the first to venture into the new and unknown can be a daunting struggle. From a lack of basic infrastructure—energy, water, cables and even access to the site—to getting a trained and skilled workforce to help put everything in place, running a hotel operation 24 hours a day, seven days a week, comes fraught with challenges. This becomes more complex when the operation is spread across 60 hectares of virgin tropical land, as with Bintan, or 280 hectares of dense mountainous rainforest in Lang Co, Vietnam, where Laguna Lang Co opened in 2013.

Each property and location was specifically picked to showcase new opportunities and designed to uphold the founding couple's **core values of embracing local cultures, traditions and landscapes.**





An appreciation of these unique environments and their exceptional biodiversity **has led to a growing awareness of the need for conservation and sustainability initiatives** at each property.

In Harmony with the Environment

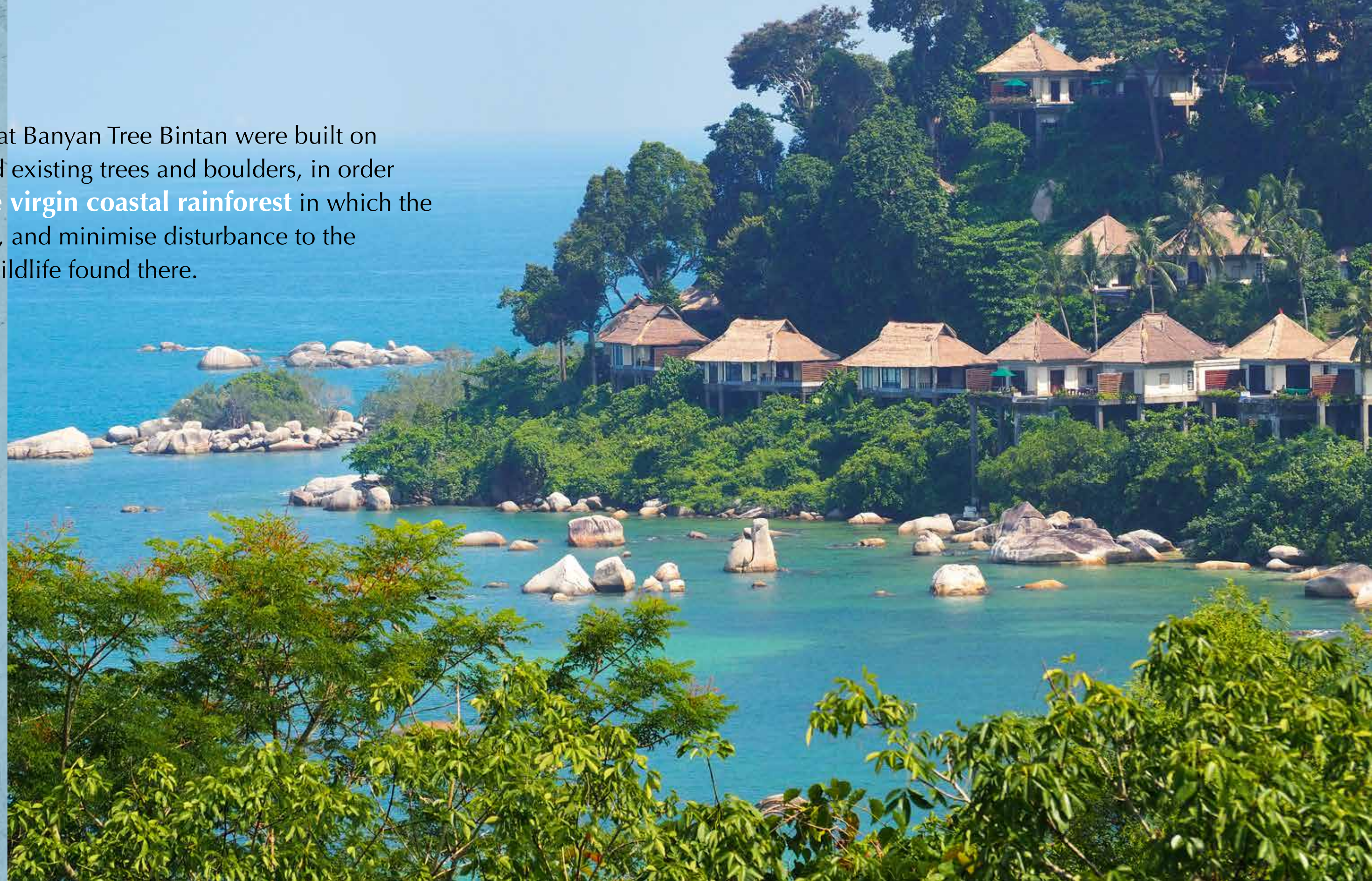
Consistent with the brand's genesis and mission statement, Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru and Banyan Tree Bintan were both designed and built in harmony with their natural surroundings. Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru is inspired by its natural beauty and in particular, its coral-rich surroundings. A carefully measured construction process was executed, involving specially requisitioned light boats to carry prefabricated villa elements ashore during construction, to protect the Maldivian island's fragile coral reefs. The main villas at Banyan Tree Bintan were built on stilts and around existing trees and boulders, in order to preserve the virgin coastal rainforest in which the property resides, and minimise disturbance to the abundance of wildlife found there.

An appreciation of these unique environments and their exceptional biodiversity has led to a growing awareness of the need for conservation and sustainability initiatives at each property. Banyan Tree has conducted research of these

environments and shared key findings with local governing bodies and research institutions, as well as community members and local schools. Raising awareness and educating people about basic principles of conservation is fundamental to Banyan Tree's mission, so as to inspire responsible behaviour and stewardship among its valued stakeholders.

Each property has at least one officially appointed Sustainability Champion who is responsible for the management and coordination of sustainability objectives. These include resource conservation initiatives and adherence to EarthCheck protocol, sourcing and reviewing sustainable supply chains, delivering sustainability training to new-hire associates, developing relations with local businesses and communities and organising sustainability activities for guests. Above all, Sustainability Champions drive each property to act as pioneers of change, supported by their General Managers and other Heads of Departments.

The main villas at Banyan Tree Bintan were built on stilts and around existing trees and boulders, in order to **preserve the virgin coastal rainforest** in which the property resides, and minimise disturbance to the abundance of wildlife found there.





Sowing Seeds for People Development



Pak Sudarno, Executive Housekeeper for Banyan Tree Bintan with over 20 years of service, used to cycle two hours along a dirt track every morning and evening to get from home to his job and back. Aside from the addition of tarmac roads and motorised transport over the past two decades, he observes changes in attitudes towards the tourism industry: “KP once asked me if I had any friends in my local village looking for jobs. But when I asked around, everyone just laughed at me. They couldn’t believe I was working in tourism! Nowadays a lot of my friends either work in hospitality, or wish they did.”

He feels that what is sorely lacking in Bintan is a culture valuing education and understanding the importance of developing skills over time to improve future prospects. The simple act of creating jobs is not always enough for a community to prosper. In turn, Banyan Tree believes that responsible businesses have a role to play in shouldering societal challenges,

such as providing equal opportunity for career growth and development, which burdens many developing nations. As more hotels and guesthouses started opening in Bintan, one of the major challenges faced, and not just by Banyan Tree, was finding enough people willing to cast away their fishing rods and the short-lived gains earned from more humble trades, let alone people with formal qualifications in hospitality, or English good enough to serve international guests expecting five-star service.

The turn of the new millennium saw Banyan Tree going through a period of rapid growth and expansion. Strong leaders who believed in the company’s vision played a critical role in ensuring its fundamental philosophy was not lost or diluted. Banyan Tree empowered every associate with the belief that they are leaders at their levels, who must execute and deliver the brand promise.

From an abandoned tin mine in the early 1990s to an award-winning hospitality brand with 47 hotels and resorts, 63 spas, 73 gallery outlets and 3 golf courses, all spread across 24 countries, Banyan Tree would not be where it is today if not for its fearless, spirited founders, who first dared to leap into the unknown, and the devoted support they received along the way.

Left: Bintan’s future generation hard at work. E kang Enculai elementary school is a beneficiary of Banyan Tree Global Foundation. *Above:* Pak Sudarno has been with Banyan Tree Bintan for over two decades.



Our
Collective
Stewardship



“Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not simply about philanthropy or monetary contributions. It is about doing good, even as companies seek profitability—a key measure of success for a business. **We seek the respect and support of our stakeholders** not only because it facilitates our sustainability, but also because it simply makes us feel good. This is our mindset.”

CLAIRE CHIANG

Responsible Tourism

Before KP and Claire first set about transforming Bang Tao Bay into a hospitality haven and a prospering community, they themselves were tourists, looking for a place to escape their busy, urban lifestyles in Singapore. However, they quickly realised that in the process, they could engage with stakeholders both actively and passively, benefitting both the destination and the individuals living there.

Banyan Tree is conscious about the dependency of tourism on the natural environment, particularly an area’s natural heritage, beauty and biodiversity. The company strives to inspire a strong sense of stewardship among its stakeholders, in order to nurture and cherish such areas and instil deep connections that form new roots, like the brand’s eponymous tree. As its mission, it takes on the responsibility of conserving and safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, promoting responsible behaviour and strengthening resilience in the face of unprecedented global change.

The Banyan Tree collection, comprising Banyan Tree, Angsana, Cassia, Dhawa, Folio and

Escape, strives to execute and deliver these brand promises, with sustainability at the heart of operational procedure, associate conduct and business strategy. To deliver on this mission, Banyan Tree has conceptualised its values based on a “For Good” framework—a visit to its hotels and resorts creates a “Stay for Good”.

Resolute in its belief that tourism has an important role to play in encouraging greater stewardship of our planet, all of Banyan Tree’s core offerings—its hotels and resorts, its three retail segments (the Spa, Gallery and Matter), its design arm, Architrave, and its own social enterprise, Seedlings Café—thoughtfully cultivate actions “for good”.

Banyan Tree encourages stewardship of the planet by providing enriching guest stay experiences that promote responsible travel, working experiences that empower associates to learn and grow, and unique sustainability experiences that strengthen communities and sustain environmental resilience.

Left: Banyan Tree Ringha guest villas, created from repurposed houses of Tibetan tribespeople.

A Workforce of Associates

Leaders at all levels champion the value of stewardship at each Banyan Tree property. A dynamic approach allows social and environmental efforts to address a range of projects pertinent to each destination. This flexible approach allows individuals, who might naturally connect with one or two particular initiatives corresponding with their own moral values, beliefs and interests, to engage with a variety of meaningful initiatives and learn about new sustainability principles.

Developing a collective mindset consistent with brand philosophy is encouraged via internal bulletins, such as the monthly “Making a Difference” (MAD) or quarterly “SEED”. These highlight progress and achievements towards the group’s sustainability goals and showcase positive changes being driven among local communities. The 15 Banyan Tree Roots provide guiding principles by which associates are encouraged to conduct their roles and responsibilities, such as “Greet everyone with a smile” (Root #1). They are displayed around

staff areas as constant reminders. Associates are greeted each morning with a Guiding Message, to motivate productivity and encourage being the best version of themselves.

“I joined Banyan Tree five years ago and have developed the habit of reading every day’s Guiding Message and thinking to myself: How can I do better today?”

MICHELLE GUO
Assistant Learning Manager, Banyan Tree Anji



Right and opposite:
Various associate development and team-building events.
Bottom left: Dedicated associates Mr Phuoc and Mrs Xinh from Laguna Lang Co.



Banyan Tree associates are encouraged to advocate stewardship through their actions and words, sharing their understanding and awareness of sustainable practices with those around them. The level of dedication shown over the past 25 years, towards achieving group sustainability objectives and creating value for local communities, stands testament to the commitment of associates. There is no fiscal remuneration for giving up free time to plant trees in the community, clean roads and beaches, or mentor community youth and teach them new skills, yet associates are eager to support and participate in the company's environmental and social responsibility initiatives, thanks to a shared conviction in Banyan Tree's core philosophy: Embracing the Environment, Empowering People. The company repays its associates' generosity and support through an ongoing commitment to investing in its people's future development and growth, empowering associates at every level to act as leaders and champion brand promises.

Steve Newman, the Group Director of Sustainability and Coordinating Director of the Banyan Tree Global Foundation (BTGF), believes Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a dying term, with sustainability and resilience embraced in its place. "Banyan Tree encourages



Left: Banyan Tree associates during associate development and team-building events. Right: Michal Zitek.

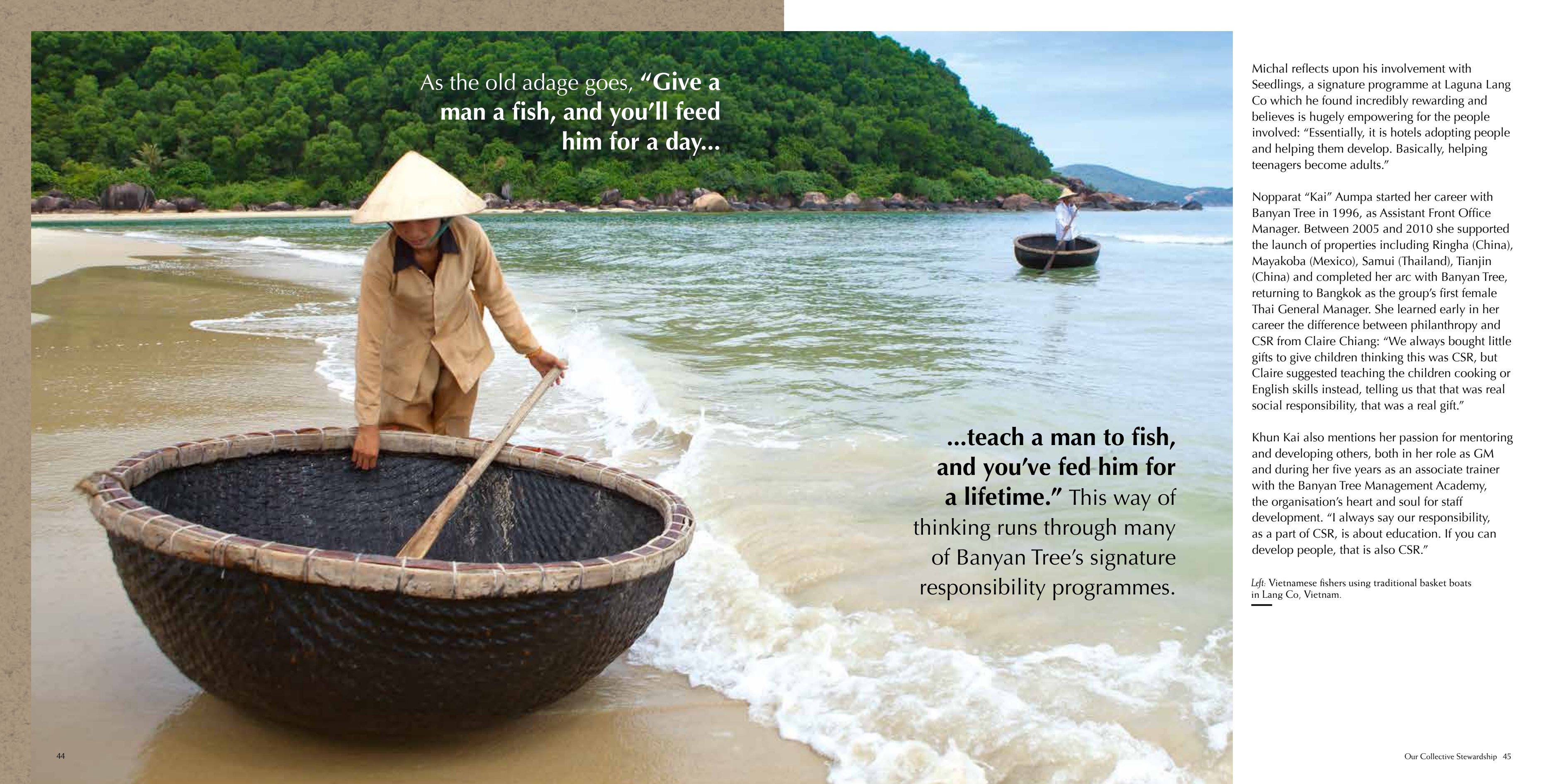
a sustainability mindset, a holistic approach to integrate sustainability in business, supporting people and the planet. Sustainability is not an aspiration, it is not marketing or philanthropy or cost cutting, it is a mindset rather than a choice, it is the right thing to do and it can be realised through a proactive, progressive and innovative approach."

One of the things that Michal Zitek, Area General Manager of Angsana Laguna Phuket, appreciates most about the experiences he has enjoyed during his career with Banyan Tree, is the company's commitment towards enriching communities and the environment. He compares the authenticity of its actions to those of other organisations: "Going back ten years I think there was still some of that brand stamping, commercialisation of something that was important, and nobody really understood the power of it, that you can change people's lives, that you can make a difference for misguided youth."



“ I was working in Malaysia in 2006 when I personally noticed CSR becoming more of a 'thing'. Prior to this it was more about philanthropy, rather than commercial sustainability. **It was based on the philanthropy of the individual, rather than as an organisational effort.** In the last ten to twelve years, I have seen sustainability become more important and more a part of the agenda, for every industry, not just hospitality.

MICHAL ZITEK
Area General Manager, Angsana Laguna Phuket



As the old adage goes, **“Give a man a fish, and you’ll feed him for a day...**

...teach a man to fish, and you’ve fed him for a lifetime.” This way of thinking runs through many of Banyan Tree’s signature responsibility programmes.

Michal reflects upon his involvement with Seedlings, a signature programme at Laguna Lang Co which he found incredibly rewarding and believes is hugely empowering for the people involved: “Essentially, it is hotels adopting people and helping them develop. Basically, helping teenagers become adults.”

Nopparat “Kai” Aumpa started her career with Banyan Tree in 1996, as Assistant Front Office Manager. Between 2005 and 2010 she supported the launch of properties including Ringha (China), Mayakoba (Mexico), Samui (Thailand), Tianjin (China) and completed her arc with Banyan Tree, returning to Bangkok as the group’s first female Thai General Manager. She learned early in her career the difference between philanthropy and CSR from Claire Chiang: “We always bought little gifts to give children thinking this was CSR, but Claire suggested teaching the children cooking or English skills instead, telling us that that was real social responsibility, that was a real gift.”

Khun Kai also mentions her passion for mentoring and developing others, both in her role as GM and during her five years as an associate trainer with the Banyan Tree Management Academy, the organisation’s heart and soul for staff development. “I always say our responsibility, as a part of CSR, is about education. If you can develop people, that is also CSR.”

Left: Vietnamese fishers using traditional basket boats in Lang Co, Vietnam.



Empowering Women



Khun Kai had to overcome certain stereotypes along her career: “Women still have a challenge in society getting to the top, especially in Asia.” She believes it was Claire and KP’s unconventional approach to business, people development and challenging social norms that facilitated her path to success. “KP didn’t care that I was Thai, or had no formal educational background. He believed that if people wanted to develop, they could.”

Female empowerment is a vital value in the Banyan Tree Group, and a personal crusade for Claire throughout her career. As an independent leader, activist and entrepreneur in conservative Singapore, Claire defied societal norms in her own right. Amongst many honours, Claire was elected President of the Association of Women

for Action and Research (AWARE) from 1993–1994, and was one of the first two women to be admitted to the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 1995. Her accolades include being named “Woman of the Year” by *Her World* magazine in 1998, and being appointed Justice of the Peace in 2008, achieving afterwards the Public Service Medal (2008) and Public Service Star BBM (2014) for her community contribution. For her work empowering women, she has won numerous awards, including more recently, “Asia’s Top Sustainability Superwoman” (2018) and the “Outstanding Women” award by *Shanghai Daily*, China (2019). Most notably of all, Claire was inducted into the Singapore Women’s Hall of Fame in 2018—a recognition of her outstanding commitment to rights for women and equality.

Khun Kai has similarly advocated female empowerment during her career, inspiring and mentoring females who have reached out for support. She believes Banyan Tree’s liberal and progressive philosophy has opened doors not just for herself, but for other females in the industry: “After the first year of my promotion I saw that the Dusit Thani and Anantara Siam also had Thai women as GMs. That shows it meant something, and I appreciate the chance I was given.”

Opposite: Coloured threads being woven into fabric.
Left: Claire Chiang visits female artisans in northern Thailand to find traditional handicrafts for the Banyan Tree Gallery and hotel furnishings.

Gift for Good

A while before the conception of the first Banyan Tree Resort, Claire chanced upon the Yasothorn village in rural northern Thailand. She was accompanying prominent women's rights activist Shirin Fozdar to see to a project, initiated in the local village, centred on the Maun triangular cushion. Seeing the potential to help small-scale cooperatives establish a sustainable source of income, a young and passionate Claire felt inspired, "It dawned on me that if buying only one of these cushions could send one child to school, with Banyan Tree we might see orders of 200, or 2,000, and we could educate entire villages." Claire attests a great amount of influence for her enabling of Banyan Tree and the Gallery in particular, to become a socio-economic platform for doing good, to Shirin Fozdar, who was instrumental in developing welfare issues across India, Thailand and Singapore in the mid-20th century.

Some time later, a women's development conference in Hanoi, Vietnam, prompted Claire to revisit the idea, with the added impetus of focusing on the status of women, and developing a business that would recognise the importance of female empowerment and self-dignity. At around the same time, Claire and KP had just set to work on their newest challenge—resort development. The Banyan Tree Gallery was their instinctive next move.

The Maun triangular cushion was one of the first items to go on sale in 1997 at the first Banyan Tree Gallery, located within the flagship property in Phuket. The outlet offered traditional, handmade Thai handicrafts, with each product telling a story about ancient techniques, culture and heritage, whether forged from metal, carved from wood, fashioned from clay, or intricately woven as basketry or fabric.



Village cooperatives and local artisans were supported as proceeds went towards providing steady livelihoods for the communities involved in their production. These were mostly women living in rural parts of the country. Purchasing a product from the Gallery signifies obtaining a "Gift for Good", inspiring guests to think beyond a mere holiday experience and consider the transformative change that responsible tourism can have.

The award-winning retail brand has since flourished, aided by the successful growth of each new Banyan Tree resort, where specialist research into indigenous crafts, culture and architectural expressions helped create a unique sense of belonging for the retail arm.

Top: Years after her first trip to the Yasothorn village in northern Thailand, Claire Chiang returns to source for additional products. *Bottom right:* Claire's first visit to the Yasothorn community where, inspired by a Maun triangular cushion project (*bottom left*), the concept behind Banyan Tree Gallery was born.

Leadership and Development

Banyan Tree harnesses much of its talent from within, with many of its senior leaders having risen through the ranks, through determination and a willingness to learn and grow. Fundamentally, they share the same vision with the brand they dedicate themselves to, executing a common philosophy and inspired by a shared mindset that values sustainability.

Good leadership within Banyan Tree is defined by the Company's IDEALS: **I**nnovation to adapt and identify creative solutions, celebrating **D**iversity and mutual respect for one another, **E**mpowerment to do what is necessary and effect change, **A**ccountability for one's actions and promises, lifelong **L**earning to harness talent, and **S**ynergy to bring about collective success.

Whenever a General Manager moves from a hotel they are asked to consider what they have made and added that was not there before. Sriram Kailasam, AGM for Banyan Tree Phuket, elaborates, "It is not just the physical aspect, but also what have you added to the people, what have you added to the guests and what have you added to the environment." Sriram experienced fast growth in his career with Banyan Tree, from Chef to AGM in a relatively short period. He reflects on the opportunities that Banyan Tree has provided him: "Of course, your KPIs, your deliverables, your finances all have to be in place, but I think in our organisation we look at and judge people beyond just the numbers." He continues, "You get those kinds of opportunities that I don't think you do in many other organisations."

Leaders such as Michal, Khun Kai and Sriram not only embody the values that underpin Banyan Tree, but are stewards in their own right, who strive to bring about positive influence and development of



others. Banyan Tree provides a platform from which people can grow, and advocates a level of freedom among its associates, at all levels, that is not always common from such high-end brands. Associates are encouraged to express individuality, personal character and cultural heritage, to add their own value to high-quality service.

Banyan Tree strives to open doors and provide enhanced professional opportunities by providing learning tools and equipping staff with new skills and experience. Associate satisfaction and training create a further vital link to the brand's ability to operate profitably. Banyan Tree tries hard to provide a rewarding and enjoyable professional life, encourage personal fulfillment beyond the workplace and prioritise conservation of the natural environment. Coming to work each day in beautiful surroundings is integral to associate welfare and satisfaction. Associates also appreciate the compassionate approach taken for the welfare of the communities around them. Many associates consider Banyan Tree more than just means to a livelihood, but a family and a place to flourish.

Rebecca Lan, Sustainability Champion for Banyan Tree Lijiang, describes how she feels walking to work every day in the mountains of China's Yunnan province as she passes children on their way to school, admires the little flowers as she enters the property and greets the public attendant who is cleaning the hotel door: "It brings me the feeling that we are all part of this world, and I draw energy from the nature, ready for a whole day's work." She adds, "When you walk around the hotel, if you listen carefully, you may hear birds, the wind, and the sound of running water."

Opposite Sriram Kailasam, AGM of Banyan Tree Phuket, began his career as a chef. Left: Nopparat "Kai" Aumpa, Banyan Tree's first female Thai GM, began her career working at front office.

Build for Good

Banyan Tree strives to not only enhance the natural environment, but create natural beauty where it previously did not exist. Banyan Tree's first urban property and city hotel was opened in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2002. Built inside an existing building to reduce reliance on new resources, this was at the time Thailand's tallest building; to this day, the Vertigo restaurant remains the highest rooftop food-and-beverage outlet in the country. In order to make up for the lack of nature often associated with big cities like Bangkok, the brand converted some car parking areas into urban oases harbouring vegetation, aquatic and avian life. In 2006, Banyan Tree Bangkok's "Forest in the City" was created by planting 1,500 trees in multiple sessions, to beautify Sathorn Gardens, adjacent to the property.

Banyan Tree is proudly sustainable by design—it "Builds for Good", prioritising the importance of managing, protecting and taking care of areas of natural or cultural heritage during the planning and development of all its properties, with third-party verification from its strategic partner EarthCheck. Following its first triumph in renovating a desolate tin mine in Phuket into a sanctuary of beauty for people, flora and fauna, the group continues to develop and grow. More than just an acknowledgment of natural beauty and a responsibility for helping the lives of others, the group's mission statement—Embracing the Environment, Empowering People—is a call to action that echoes through every decision, every process and every detail in Banyan Tree operations.

In a rapidly changing world, collective action is required to address daunting global challenges. As tourism becomes a larger part of our lives—whether we turn to it for time away from work or to explore new and exotic places, learn about different cultures and heritage, try new sports and activities, or whether it provides a form of livelihood—it has the transformative power to promote positive change. Stewardship encompasses the idea of looking after fellow people and our planet. This is especially critical for the environment, which desperately needs people who are willing to act as guardians to prevent its destruction. Banyan Tree consistently considers its impact on the local environment and communities, inspiring its associates and partner-stakeholders to act as stewards of sustainable change.

“To be a true eco-warrior, you need courage to do what is different, you need to think strategically. It is about going into unknown areas and championing them, so you need **perseverance, determination and spirit**. At Banyan Tree we Build for Good, spreading our roots among communities to anchor us for the long term.”

CLAIRE CHIANG



Embracing
the

Environment

Trees are symbolic of the brand's philosophy on sustainability, and so the Greening Communities initiative was born **to restore areas of degradation by planting trees**—if one tree is cut down, another one is planted.



Tackling Climate Change

Arguably the greatest challenge facing the world today is climate change, and the many issues and consequences intricately linked to this wide-reaching phenomenon. Banyan Tree believes that tackling global climate change requires collective action, and is intrinsically linked to responsible and sustainable development. Climate change is at the forefront of the brand's sustainability efforts, and its approach integrates climate action with environmental, social and governance sustainability efforts; in alignment with the 2015 World Travel and Tourism Council's call for private parties to connect with global climate action. Banyan Tree assimilates climate change and related issues into its business strategy, operations, staff development and guest experience. It also looks to inspire hope by providing examples of simple changes we can all consider making in our lives, to help reduce negative impacts on our environment.

As a mindful developer, Banyan Tree approaches sustainable development as a balancing act between preserving a site in its entirety and long-term impacts on surrounding environments. For example, after acquiring the title deeds to the land upon which Banyan Tree Seychelles would be built, careful consideration was made to conserve the wetlands found in the centre of the property—home to two species of critically endangered freshwater turtles (terrapins)—as well as to renovate the old colonial buildings that were once the ex-owners' homes. A huge effort was also made to make the resort as unobtrusive as possible, so that looking back at it from the beach one can hardly see the luxury villas tucked into the landscape.

Trees are symbolic of the brand's philosophy on sustainability, and so the Greening Communities initiative was born to restore degraded areas by planting trees—if one tree is cut down, another one is planted. During the first decade of operations after the very first tree was planted in Laguna Phuket by Khun Prasert, more than half-a-million trees have been planted by the group in other public spaces around the world, often with the support of guests, NGOs and community members. The act of greening serves a further reminder about the importance of conservation, and provides a relatable connection with concepts such as the role of deforestation in climate change.

Many different types of trees have been planted as part of the programme, including orchards of fruit trees and beaches of coconut palms. These provide additional value to the communities they are donated to, encouraging wellbeing through healthy sources of nutrition. Although there is a group-wide target of 2,000 trees per property each year, some are constrained by feasibility and space. In the Maldives, efforts additionally assist natural recovery of coral reefs from disturbance, creating complex and diverse habitats that also protect shorelines and contribute to the long-term sustainability of these fragile coral islands.

Left: Associate volunteers taking part in tree planting for the Greening Communities initiative in Phuket.

Coral Reef Restoration


The Maldives comprises a long chain of over a thousand coral islands that took thousands of years to form, and stretch north to south, crossing the equator in the North Indian Ocean. Within this tropical paradise live some of the world's most colourful and diverse coral reefs. Accentuated by endless sunlight refracted through crystal clear water, these aqua-blue plains are home to myriad varieties of marine life, making this archipelago any marine scientist's dream.

Abdul Azeez, a passionate environmentalist who once worked for the Maldivian government's ministry of Agriculture, was lured by the irresistible charm of his home country's coral reefs, enough to divert his interest towards marine science.

Azeez became involved with developing the small island of Ihuru, which later came to be Banyan Tree's second property in the Maldives, under its sister brand, Angsana. Angsana Ihuru is an almost perfectly circular island, not far from Maldives' capital island Malé, in the Central Atolls. As Director of Conservation at that time, Azeez worked with a few international scientists to learn about propagating coral from small fragments with a structure in the water. The reefs around Ihuru and many other islands across the Maldives had been badly affected by coral bleaching events, caused by heightened sea temperatures during the 1988 global El Niño, and were left fragile and in desperate need of recovery.

Right: The Necklace, second of three electric reefs constructed by Banyan Tree conservation teams in the Maldives, was created in 1998 to reduce shoreline erosion on Angsana Ihuru.





Interested in pioneering reef conservation in the Maldives further, Azeez explored a new form of reef enhancement technology called Biorock®, started in the Caribbean by Professor Wolf Hilbertz and Dr Tom Goreau of the Global Coral Reef Alliance. It wasn't long before the Barnacle was installed on Ihuru reef, the Maldives' first electric reef. At the time innovative, this approach applied a weak electric current to expedite coral growth, with an observed additional benefit that many of the corals survived the 1998 El Niño event.

Azeez is rightfully proud of the Barnacle: "Our structure in the Maldives is now 21 years old, and it remains, despite the bad weather here. When it is connected to the electric current it becomes stronger and stronger by the day."

His proactive approach to protecting the local reefs spurred the construction of two further electric reefs for Banyan Tree and the Maldives, the Necklace (Angsana Ihuru, 1998) and the Lotus (Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, 2001).

With Angsana Ihuru officially opening its doors to guests in 2001, Azeez continued to work on restoring and conserving the coral reefs for both islands, while educating guests, associates and community members from neighbouring islands about the wonderful world that lies below the waves. In January 2004, the Banyan Tree Marine Lab, another first of its kind, was officially opened. This facility not only received financial backing from the company but also received personal

support from Claire and KP, who often visited and spent time learning about this incredible coral ecosystem. This became the first resort-based research facility in the Maldives. Supported by Azeez and his growing team of both trained biologists and aspiring locals, the Banyan Tree Marine Lab began to conduct environmental research, conservation, restoration and awareness. It became a recognised hub for education—sharing the necessity of marine conservation and sustainable livelihoods in the Maldives with local schools and communities—as well as international research, with expert scientists visiting from around the world to conduct important fieldwork in this unique environment.

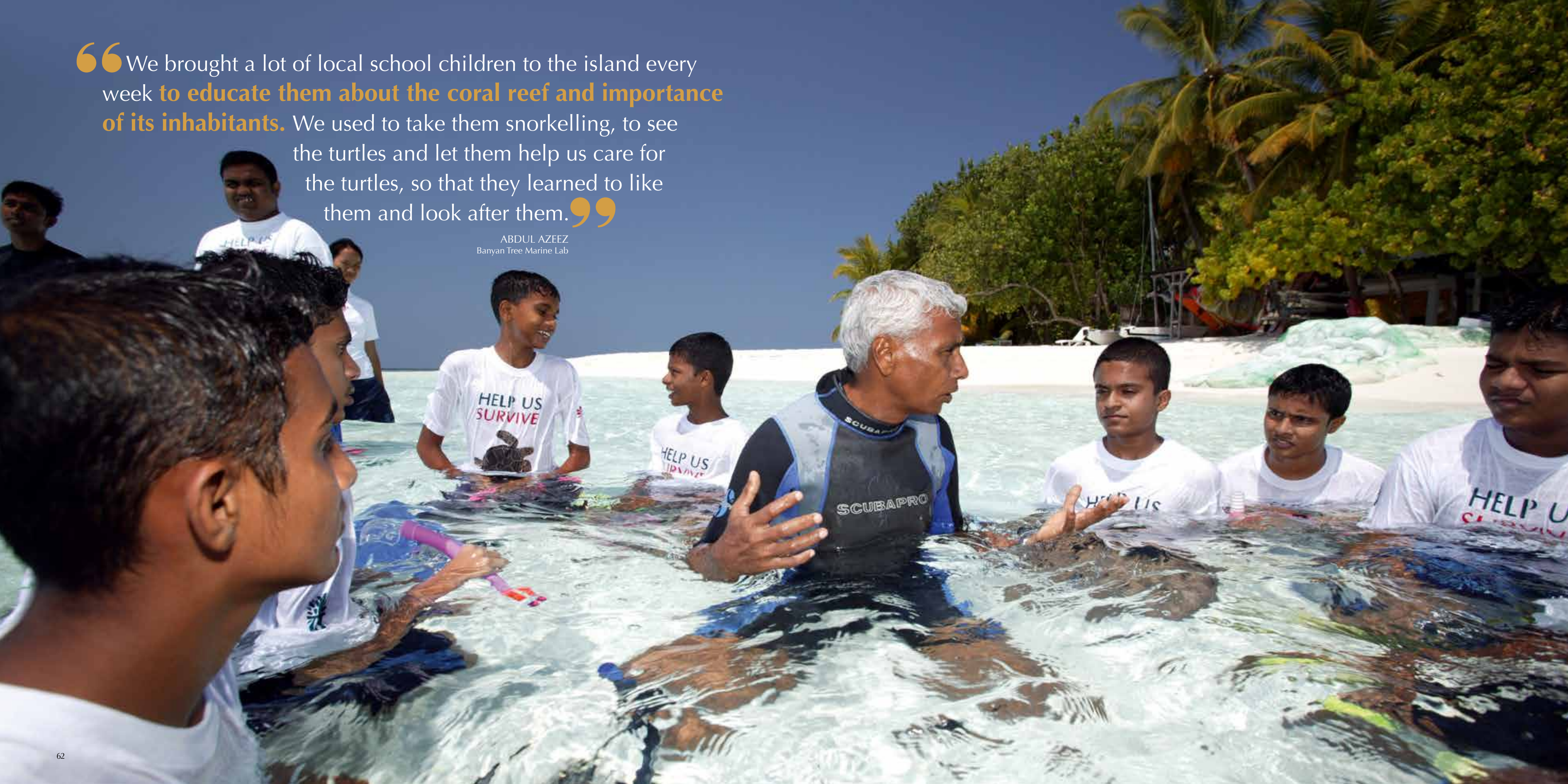
Following the success of the first Banyan Tree Marine Lab on Vabbinfaru Island, in contributing to both the scientific body of knowledge, as well as the community's understanding of the importance of environmental conservation, a second Marine Lab was opened in the Maldives in 2007 in Angsana Velavaru in Dhaalu Atoll, and a Conservation Lab that focuses on both marine and terrestrial conservation in Bintan, Indonesia.

Left: Built in 1996, the Barnacle was the first structure of its kind in the world to apply a weak electrical current to promote calcification, coral growth and resilience to environmental disturbance. *Right:* Coral reef restoration efforts are supported by coral nurseries, where coral fragments are protected and cared for until transplanted to assist the natural recovery of a diverse and healthy functioning reef.



“ We brought a lot of local school children to the island every week **to educate them about the coral reef and importance of its inhabitants.** We used to take them snorkelling, to see the turtles and let them help us care for the turtles, so that they learned to like them and look after them.”

ABDUL AZEEZ
Banyan Tree Marine Lab





Mangrove Restoration

Under the stewardship of the Marine and Conservation Lab efforts, these properties, as well as Banyan Tree's coastal properties in Thailand, Mexico and Seychelles, joined the Greening Communities initiative by supporting mangrove tree restoration.

Mangroves are hugely important, yet under-valued, ecosystems that provide natural protection to coastal human populations.

Mangroves also serve as shelter and refuge for marine life, and underpin fisheries by acting as nurseries for many commercially important and endangered crab, fish and shrimp species. Recently, some of the world's biggest nature conservation organisations, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), have formed an alliance with a goal to increase the world's mangrove habitat by 20 percent before 2030. Banyan Tree properties have similarly formed alliances with local communities to conduct mangrove restoration and awareness initiatives, as well as promote community-based tourism and ecosystem management.

Baan Thasak is a small traditional fishing village in north Phuket located amidst lush mangroves, meandering along the edge of the Andaman Sea. Here, the Thasak community have lived peacefully, keeping mostly to themselves. Khun

Chaitawee "Chai" Panthip, the community leader, describes how a small group of fishermen initially moved here to catch shrimp, used for the popular Thai cooking staple, shrimp paste. They built small houses on stilts to wait between tides, but were challenged by the condition of the mangroves, much of which had been burned to produce charcoal. To expand the enterprise, they created a man-made shrimp farm, felling more trees to create space. This led to a severe decline in the natural ecosystem and shrimp populations, greatly impacting their livelihoods. They saw a connection between the poor harvests of shrimp with the poor condition of the environment and began looking at ways to restore the ecosystem back to health. Although it was a difficult time, it strengthened community bonds, and working together to reserve the area from shrimp farming, they looked toward sustainable forms of livelihood, working on simple "homemade" conservation ideas. Relying on wit, having never had a formal education, their ideas were ingenious—building nets that trapped marine waste carried in by the tides, which they sold off as raw materials. This also provided a solution to the growing problem of marine waste, which they rightly assumed must be entering the food chain, further impacting not only fish stocks, but their own health.

Opposite and right: The Banyan Tree properties prioritise restoration of sensitive habitats and ecosystems across the world. Pictured here is Banyan Tree Mayakoba in Mexico, where mangrove forests are undergoing restoration.



Having fought off recent attempts from developers to build a yachting marina in the area, which would once again threaten this sensitive ecosystem, the small community continues to sustain itself. Khun Chai is however concerned for the community's future, with regional fish stocks still dwindling and the community having to travel further out to sea to find their catch, due to threats on larger scales such as commercial fishing and climate change. Khun Chai, a pragmatic and resilient thinker, has not given up hope. Ever willing to diversify his community's livelihood to improve its prospects, he entered a productive partnership with Banyan Tree, whose philosophy of operating as a responsible business matches his own approach to managing his community. Fostered through the Greening Communities initiative, for which Banyan Tree associates and Thasak community members planted 3,000 mangrove saplings in one day alone, the relationship now looks ahead at opportunities for community visits and mangrove tours that focus on raising awareness about the important role of these threatened local ecosystems, and the critical need to conserve them. Khun Chai also hopes this opportunity will convince the younger generations to study the cause, and rather than taking their knowledge to the city, will return to the community to help grow and develop their collective prospects. Khun Chai explains how Banyan Tree impressed him with follow-up visits and maintaining contact after the Greening Communities event: "Other organisations just visit and leave, without follow-up." Khun Peera, Assistant Director of Community Relations and CSR for Laguna Phuket, who was advised to contact the Thasak community by local government, is keen to grow this strategic partnership and explore additional



opportunities to support the Thasak community, such as utilising its mobile learning centre, Fully Booked!, for the benefit of the local children.

Another chance encounter brought the team at Bintan's Conservation Lab into contact with the community of Pengudang Village where some of the property's associates reside. Having collaborated to restore the mangroves in the area, as part of the Greening Communities initiative and Earth Day celebrations, the Lab has begun to support the growth of community-based ecotours and greater conservation initiatives. Pak Iwan Winarto, Head of Ecotourism Management for Pengudang Mangrove has joined the Bintan Sustainable Tourism Development Forum, which Banyan Tree Bintan plays a big role in coordinating and driving.

Left: Khun Chai, a pragmatic and resilient thinker, entered a productive partnership with Banyan Tree to restore mangroves and the fisheries they support. *Above:* Khun Peera has played a central role in developing Laguna Phuket's social responsibility initiatives and community relations.

Minimising Footprints

In 2007, Banyan Tree launched group-wide efforts to monitor and systematically reduce carbon emissions from its resorts, spurring other resource conservation initiatives that target reduction of energy and water consumption, and incorporate reduction of waste sent to landfill, specifically plastic and food. Properties have adopted innovative approaches to tackling greater awareness of responsible consumption and the 5Rs: Reduce, Refuse, Reuse, Recycle and Remove. These include upcycling old hot tubs from villas into tanks used to care for sea turtles in the Seychelles, collaborating with NGOs such as Scholars of Sustenance (SOS) who redistribute unused food to the homeless in Bangkok, donating food waste to pig farms in Lijiang, Cabo Marques, and even converting food waste into methane to be distributed among communities for use in home-cookers in Samui. Having trialled innovative concepts such as solar-powered golf buggies at some of its bigger properties such as Bintan, Phuket and Lang Co, Banyan Tree looks further to the future, aiming to switch to cleaner sources of energy and renewables wherever possible. At Banyan Tree Seychelles, the entire fleet of diesel vehicles was converted to run on biodiesel sourced from recycled cooking oil, an initiative that became successful enough for the property to start collecting used cooking oil from other local businesses, thus preventing it from being sent to Africa, as was done previously.

Gilmer Novelo, a food-and-beverage service attendant for Banyan Tree Mayakoba, admits that since working for the brand and engaging in CSR activities, he has adopted more responsible practices at home such as recycling, waste



separation and reducing electrical usage. He thinks Earth Hour, the annual global lights-off event that encourages the switching off of lights for an hour to raise awareness about climate change, is highly impactful, despite being so simple, and believes it should be practiced all the time, not just once a year, “to let our planet breathe”.

To combat the daunting threats facing our planet and natural environment, a diverse array of initiatives that involve multiple parties, are coordinated by Banyan Tree and implemented by associates and stakeholders.

Top: Banyan Tree associates around the world are active and enthusiastic participants in Earth Hour every year. *Bottom, left and right:* Banyan Tree associates, guests and members of public coming together for global Community Cleaning initiatives.

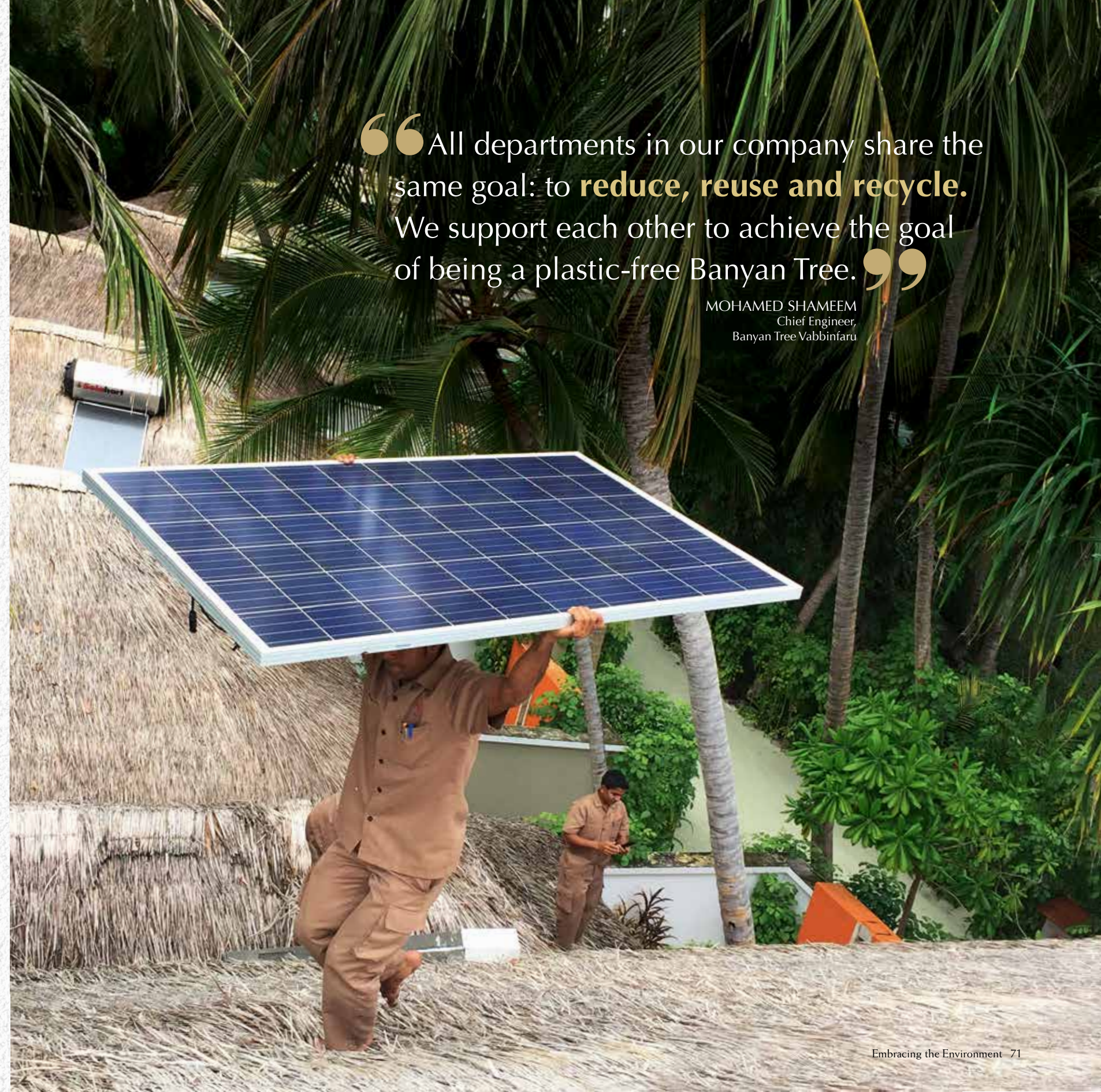


Simple, yet effective changes put in place by all Banyan Tree properties, such as upgrading air-conditioning units and swapping light bulbs for LEDs, provide inspiration for associates to adopt similar practices at home.

Much like Earth Hour, Earth Day is another global celebration of the natural environment founded in 1970, and has been supported by Banyan Tree annually since 2006. With its theme connecting to the environment more broadly than Earth Hour, various activities have been dedicated to its cause by the brand's properties, including environmental presentations, community clean-ups, tree plantings, turtle releases, nature treks and guided snorkelling. Earth Day 2018 was themed around the increasing threat of plastic

pollution, with Banyan Tree taking decisive action, pledging commitment from all of its resorts to eliminate single-use plastic from operations. This pledge highlights the growing concern for plastic pollution entering the natural environment, particularly our oceans, and emphasises the need for greater awareness concerning global consumption behaviour and effective waste management. Efforts saw one in every four items of single-use plastic used by the group (over four million items in total) prevented from being sent to landfill in the first year alone. Items were specifically targeted from a total list of 31 commonly used items in hospitality such as straws, drinks bottles, bags, cocktail stirrers, cutlery and takeaway containers, mini-bar items, bathroom amenities and food packaging.

Left: A young Banyan Tree guest signing her support for a plastic-free Earth Day 2018. *Bottom and opposite:* Properties look to conserve resources through innovative solutions such as solar-powered buggies, hydroponic vegetable gardens and solar energy.



“All departments in our company share the same goal: to **reduce, reuse and recycle**. We support each other to achieve the goal of being a plastic-free Banyan Tree.”

MOHAMED SHAMEEM
Chief Engineer,
Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru



Turtle Conservation

Nestled between tropical palms, in a small sandy cove on the northern shores of Bintan, lies the small community of Kampung Baru. This is pretty much the only indigenous community still living a traditional lifestyle in the Lagoi tourism district of Bintan: largely self-sufficient, supported by small-scale farming and fishing, and supplemented by a little community-based tourism. The majority of tourists coming to the village from surrounding resorts are interested in experiencing the simple, traditional lifestyle that was once the norm across the whole island, as well as supporting the sea turtle conservation efforts that have become a focus for the village in more recent years. Pak Lalu Sabri, the Kampung Baru Community Coordinator and Chairperson of Bintan Sea Turtle Conservation explains how local perceptions and attitudes towards sea turtle conservation have not always been so understanding and supportive.

“Before Banyan Tree began operating on this island, we didn’t know that sea turtles were a protected species, in fact we didn’t know much about them at all,” states Pak Sabri. “Our community, and many others here in Bintan, used to take the turtle eggs to eat, or sell in the market

... mostly to Singapore.” Pak Sabri explains the challenges in educating people about turtles and his role as a steward of change. “In the beginning it was difficult to make them aware, but I was provided with useful information about sea turtles, which I was able to deliver to communities around Bintan.”

Banyan Tree provided much of this information, aligning its own turtle conservation programme with the need for better awareness across Bintan. It first focused on explaining the need for sea turtle conservation, then concentrated more intensely on physical conservation and active awareness through participation. Understanding the requirement for alternative livelihoods for those depending on the sale of turtle eggs at market, Banyan Tree devised an intuitive tactic to compensate fishing folk from Kampung Baru, while simultaneously strengthening ties with the community. “When we found sea turtle nests we told Banyan Tree, and were compensated with diesel: 100 litres for two nests,” Pak Sabri explains. A Letter of Agreement was formalised, including a further 100 litres monthly fuel contribution, with the understanding that the village would maintain a healthy environment, free from litter and trash—a common issue in Bintan at this time. This was good for the environment, but also improved the perceptions and experiences of visitors, adding further economic value to the small community. The diesel fuels the village’s generator, gifted by the local government, providing power for the villagers who were otherwise off the grid. It is a mutually beneficial agreement, saving the villagers money and providing further incentive to support the sea turtle conservation efforts, as well as better

Above: Banyan Tree Maldives hopes to raise awareness and provide experiential learning about important causes such as endangered sea turtle conservation. *Right:* Henry Singer has played a fundamental role in spreading awareness of environmental conservation in Bintan.

“When our guests or local children see a turtle hatchling splash into the surf for the very first time, they are touched by the experience; it leaves a **lasting impression.**”

HENRY SINGER
Environmental Naturalist and Manager
of Banyan Tree’s Conservation Lab



general environmental practices, such as good waste management.

Pak Sabri points out that it is also a demonstration of the villagers' commitment to supporting tourism development in the area, with the understanding that increased opportunities will benefit them directly. "We hope in the near future resorts like Banyan Tree can do more to help our village's young people, supporting their education and especially English communication skills. We want to encourage resorts to send more guests to our village, to buy our traditional crafts and see our way of living," says Pak Sabri. Banyan Tree's workforce already comprises locals from the village who have benefitted from extensive training, and the resort is keen to continue offering this opportunity. It is currently the only property bringing guests to the village, via activities such as nature walks, local community visits and fishing tours, with small purchases of items such as coconuts and local handicrafts, and tips or donations, all helping to support the villagers.

Since changes in 2016 of the operational scope of the local Marine Fishery Agency (MFA), from district- to provincial-level, the community has faced a significant setback to its turtle conservation programme. Banyan Tree is currently the only support they have, as the MFA who initially helped finance the Bintan Sea Turtle Conservation facility and supported daily operations, are now too busy and have stopped visiting. Henry Singer, Environmental Naturalist and Manager of Banyan Tree's Conservation Lab says, "We are working together and trying to get through to government, but it is very difficult." Henry defends the commitment of the partnership: "We have a strong relationship, we even share our turtle hatchlings for guest releases, if it is requested." Pak Sabri acknowledges this:



"Other resorts in the area have their own turtle programmes, but it is not true conservation, they just focus on providing an experience for guests, they do not try to help the local community."

PAK LALU SABRI
Kampung Baru Community Coordinator and
Chairperson, Bintan Sea Turtle Conservation

Generally, however, the community is very supportive of the sea turtle conservation. Henry adds, "Now, for example, when the fishermen set up a net-trap in the beach, they are always careful not to trap a turtle and they try to avoid areas where they know there are turtles coming to nest. There has certainly been a change in behaviour by the people of Kampung Baru like that."

Pak Sabri hopes that "in the near future, resorts like Banyan Tree can do more to help our village's young people, supporting their education and especially English communication skills. We want to encourage resorts to send more guests to our village, to buy our traditional crafts and see our way of living."

Left: Bintan Sea Turtle Conservation facilities in Kampung Baru, Indonesia, which are supported through a collaborative relationship with Banyan Tree Bintan.



Empowering

People

Champions for Change



Each property's Sustainability Champion, together with a Green Team comprising volunteers, is responsible for spearheading and coordinating sustainability initiatives that engage Banyan Tree stakeholders in both environmental action (restoring, conserving and monitoring) and community action (supporting education, health and wellbeing, and cultural heritage). They look for opportunities to enhance and protect the local environment, and build relationships with the larger community.

Sustainability Champions consistently seek to connect guests to this bigger picture by offering ideas on reducing environmental footprints. They also give regular talks to guests and fellow associates, on topics like plastic and air pollution, climate change, local culture and history, fragile ecosystems (such as coral reefs and rainforests)

and animal biodiversity. Guests can pursue their interests in a range of activities—such as discovering what an ecologist does, participating in “citizen science” snorkels in the Maldives, shadowing a marine biologist for a day in Samui and trekking in Bintan's rainforest—to observe and record the key species that act as indicators of each ecosystem's health.

Above: Banyan Tree's diverse group of Sustainability Champions together in Phuket for training in 2018. *Opposite (clockwise from top left):* Associates cleaning in Shanghai; Buddhist alms giving in Phuket; Alichith Phengsavanh teaching associates in Laos about Sustainability; guest children participating in Banyan Tree Samui's Heroes for Nature activity; associates of Laguna Lang Co provide companionship to local elder; Khun Prae Sunantaraks, former head of sustainability in Phuket during greening activity; Adlan Bakti, Terrestrial Conservation Officer accompanying guests on a nature trek in Bintan; Mohamed Arzan and Muhannik Mohamed plant corals with guests in Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru.





Opposite: Claire Chiang and KP enjoying the 25th anniversary celebrations of Laguna Phuket Kindergarten in 2018, together with their family: Ren Hua and baby Rocket (left), Ren Yung (second from right) and Ren Chun (right). This kindergarten was an early signal of Banyan Tree's commitment to developing future generations.
Left: Associates of Angsana Xi'an Lintong enjoying a themed celebration.

Bringing People Together

Banyan Tree's participatory approach to promoting sustainability amongst stakeholders has given birth to a diverse array of programmes and initiatives over the course of its 25-year journey. These are encouraged among guests and Banyan Tree associates and within communities. Not all Banyan Tree initiatives are born equal; while many have been conceived from a thoughtful and structured planning process to achieve maximum impact, others are the charming product of chance.

Sriram Kailasam, AGM for Banyan Tree Phuket, recounts how an intuitive response to a problem developed into Banyan Tree Phuket's "Walk and Talk" initiative. "About six years ago, during the monsoon season, I was out on the beach and noticed a vast amount of debris and litter that had washed up. I called the team together, telling them we had to do something about it, and from then on, every Wednesday afternoon, we would

meet to collect litter on the beach for an hour or so, after which we would go for a run, or a hike, or play some kind of game or activity together. It is a great chance for us to have a little chat and enjoy a fun and healthy activity together in the outdoors, not dealing with each other as a GM to a waiter, et cetera, but just as people in shorts and T-shirts, doing something good for the environment." The initiative is still going strong and Sriram feels that it has allowed the team to deepen their relationships and level of camaraderie.

Following the successful launch of Laguna Phuket Kindergarten, Banyan Tree further demonstrated its commitment to developing future generations by hosting a grand celebration of Thailand's Children's Day in 1993, the year before its flagship property opened. Peera Pomsook, Assistant Director of CSR and Community Relations for Laguna Phuket, explains that in



the 1990s, rural children would have to travel very far into town to participate in such an event, so it was really something special. The event has become a highlight community celebration ever since, with hundreds of people coming together each year for a fun-filled day of activities, celebrating the next generation's bright prospects. What also makes the event significant is the blending of different cultures, with guests of all Laguna Resort hotels invited to attend with their families, and to play games and interact with the local Thai children.

Peera elaborates: "Our Children's Day activities aim to encourage and inspire children to become active, informed and concerned citizens of the future, and to help them recognise the importance of their roles in society."

This idea of bringing different nationalities together is put in place at properties across the whole group. Families who stay at Banyan Tree properties have the opportunity to take their children to visit a local school, orphanage or social centre—reading books, learning and playing together with children of different cultures, nationalities and social backgrounds.

Stay for Good

Anna Foster, her husband and their two-year-old son were left with a lasting impression, following their visit to Laguna Lang Co, where they participated in "English is Fun". A former ESL teacher, Anna states how children's wellbeing is very close to her heart, and despite

the local school differing so much from the schools she was used to in Europe, she was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the local children to learn something new. "There isn't much in terms of support equipment for teachers, so they have to be very creative in order to come up with a proper learning environment," she explains.

As well as the overall experience of observing how local Vietnamese schools operate, Anna believes the experience demonstrated that Banyan Tree lives up to its promises about the values it shares. After returning home, she kept in touch with the CSR team, trying to find a way she might be useful to the school; she generously donated books for the school, and continues to send gifts from Europe to this day. "I am open to support the CSR activities further; it shouldn't be a one-off reaction. I have engaged a large Luxembourgish community for the English book collection and I would be very happy to support their activities again. People are always happy to donate, especially if it's for a noble cause." Anna believes that had her family not participated in this meaningful activity, it would have just been another holiday by the sea.

Adopting the "Stay for Good" concept, guests are invited to learn about Banyan Tree's philosophy on sustainability from the moment they enter their rooms. A sand-filled cloth turtle or starfish accompanies a message on a leaf about the Green Imperative Fund (GIF), Banyan Tree's means of raising donations that go a long way in supporting its

Opposite: Paola Rubio, ex-CSR Champion for Mayakoba, contributed greatly to the development of sustainability-focused initiatives for the property. *Right:* A local child has her face painted by a Banyan tree associate in Lang Co, Vietnam.



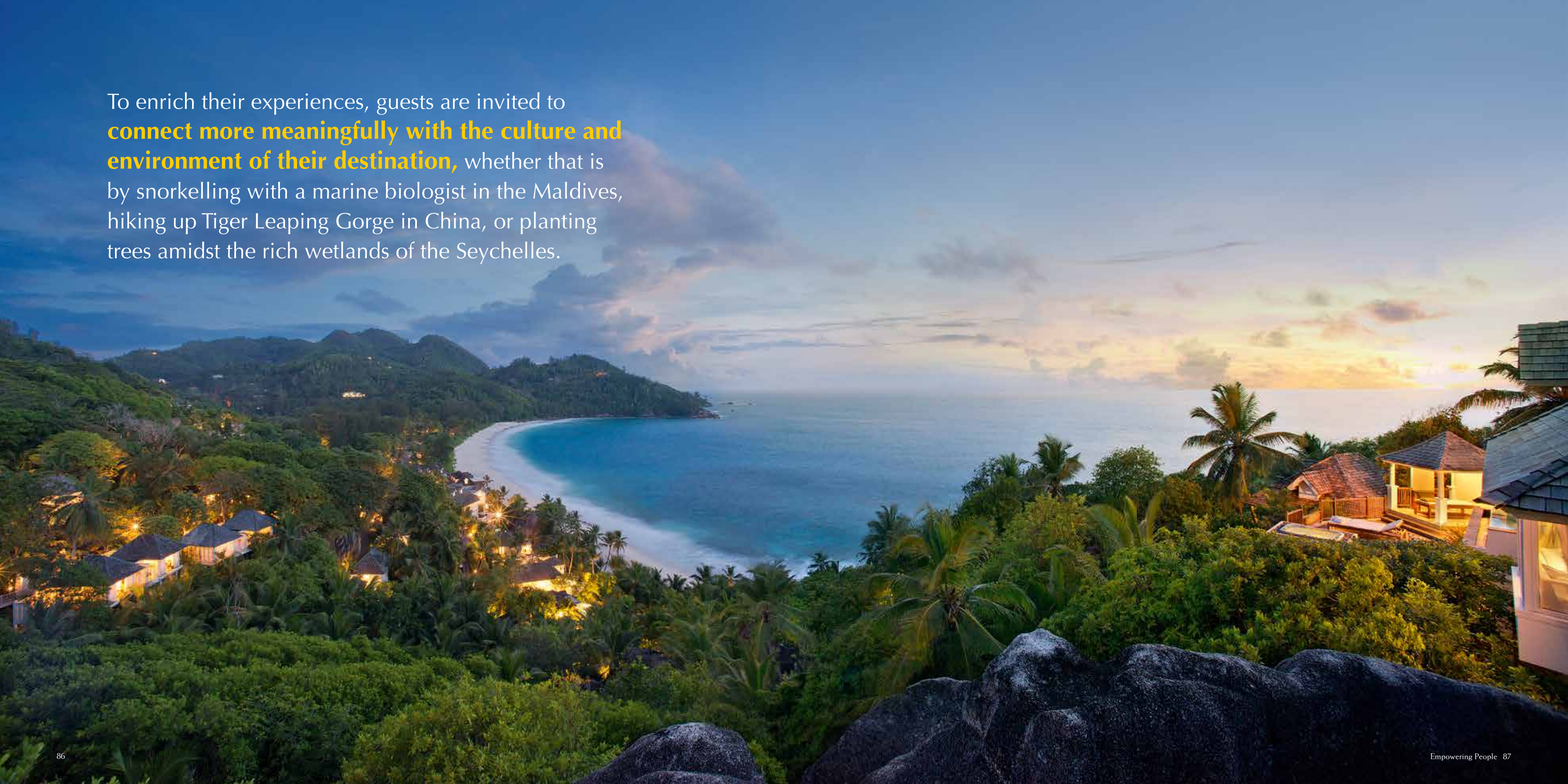


plethora of “For Good” social and environmental activities around the world. The voluntary guest contributions, USD2 per night at Banyan Tree, USD1 per night for Angsana, and USD1 per stay at Cassia and Dhawa, are matched by each property, dollar-for-dollar, with the sand-filled gifts offered as a gesture of appreciation, but also a reminder of Banyan Tree’s commitment to environmental protection.

Guests are also invited to connect and engage with localised themes. This enriches not only their aesthetic experience of a destination, but also provides deeper understanding of these often new and exciting environments, such as snorkelling with a marine biologist in the vibrant coral reefs of Thailand, Mexico or the Maldives; hiking the astounding Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and Tiger Leaping Gorge in China’s Yunnan province; planting trees amidst the mangroves and rich wetlands of the Seychelles and Mauritius; or trekking with a guide through the abundant rainforests of Indonesia. Guests are also provided the chance to interact with the area’s heritage, such as discovering the Mayan ruins near Mayakoba, staying in an old farmhouse of the Tibetan Bön Shaman warrior tribe in the mountains near Ringha, drinking locally distilled rum to stories of pirates and the once-forbidden Moutya dance, fashioned by slaves in colonial Seychelles, or appreciating the rich artistic influences of the many Chinese dynasties that shaped Xi’an Lintong, a district situated at the start of the Silk Road and home to the famous terracotta warriors.

Left: Guests of Banyan Tree Lijiang and Ringha encountering the magnificence of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in Yunnan Province, China.

To enrich their experiences, guests are invited to **connect more meaningfully with the culture and environment of their destination**, whether that is by snorkelling with a marine biologist in the Maldives, hiking up Tiger Leaping Gorge in China, or planting trees amidst the rich wetlands of the Seychelles.



A sea turtle hatchling release, whether in Bintan, Phuket, Samui, Seychelles, Mayakoba or Maldives, serves a valuable conservation purpose through education, as well as being a wonderful photo opportunity for social media. Guests are encouraged to intimately connect with these endangered animals that are threatened by human activity such as marine pollution and the growing mass of disposable plastic, accumulating in our oceans as a result of modern throwaway culture. Azeez reminisces about how encouraging both locals' and guests' children to help care for sea turtle hatchlings under the Maldives Marine Lab's head-start programme was a great way to engage them on the need for conserving these threatened animals. Similarly, guests invited to plant coral are given the opportunity to see these intriguing organisms close up and learn how they are part of extremely complex and yet highly sensitive ecosystems, now severely threatened across the planet by rising sea temperatures—a phenomenon most of us contribute to, often unknowingly, through simple everyday actions such as driving to work.

In these ways, Banyan Tree inspires its guests to consider their holiday location, the values underpinning sustainable travel, and how they might carry the torch as stewards of positive change, both as mindful visitors to a foreign land and as ordinary locals once back home.

Engagement through Food, Culture and Art

Engaging guests by offering experiences may be as subtle and indirect as dining in a restaurant that embraces local cuisine and regional flavours. Rice Bowl at Laguna Lang Co honours the timeless grain that is a cornerstone of Vietnamese and other Asian cuisines. Its menu focuses not only on the local use of this staple, but also on other regional dishes that honour the humble staple, such as sushi and sticky rice puddings. Angsana Xi'an Lintong's Silk Road Restaurant draws on Middle Eastern influences thoughtfully infused with Tang dynasty-era art and traditional Chinese musical instruments. Staff induction training includes learning about each item found around the property, so they can share the facts with guests.

Banyan Tree Mayakoba in Mexico also uses art to engage stakeholders. Guests and local artisans and indigenous producers collaborate on the "Kiwik" initiative, an interchange experience that promotes fair trade of art and crafts. Another urban art community project involves groups of volunteers, including hotel guests and associates, working on a wall mural in Playa del Carmen that offers messages of environmental and social harmony.



Right: A traditional Tang dynasty welcome ceremony is performed at Angsana Xi'an Lintong.



Engagement through Sport

Banyan Tree Bangkok has hosted the prestigious Vertical Marathon every year since 1999 to raise proceeds for the HIV Formula Feeding Fund that provides babies of HIV-positive mothers with a special milk formula. Each year 800 participants, comprising fitness enthusiasts, charity supporters and members of the public, are drawn to the challenge from all corners of the world, and have contributed over 3.8 million baht (roughly US\$115,000) to date for the HIV Formula Feeding Fund. In neighbouring Laos, Angsana's boutique property, Maison Souvannaphoum, supports the half marathon in the UNESCO world heritage city of Luang Prabang.

At Laguna Phuket, an annual charity marathon and triathlon attracts over 10,000 participants each year to raise funds for the Laguna Phuket Foundation. Established in 2009, the foundation's initiatives include the Developing Sustainable Schools Program, which in turn supports the School Partnership Project, Survival Swim with Laguna Phuket, the Laguna Phuket Community English Language Centre and the Fully Booked! mobile learning centre for youngsters. The foundation also supports ongoing sea turtle conservation efforts by Phuket Marine Biological Center and 3rd Area Naval Command, Royal Thai Navy. The marathon and triathlon also helps raise awareness and funds for the Children First Fund (CFF), which supports the nutrition of needy children. CFF has benefitted more than 400 orphans and underprivileged children across seven orphanages in Phuket.

Right: Participants at the Banyan Tree Bangkok vertical marathon.
Inset: Sir Nick Faldo teaching golf to rural Vietnamese children at Laguna Lang Co's golf course.





Group-Wide Campaigns

Each year, group-wide campaigns are coordinated and launched with guidance from the Banyan Tree Global Foundation (BTGF), the organisation's non-profit arm established in 2009, which focuses the group's sustainability strategy and framework toward important global challenges. BTGF functions as an in-house sustainability consultancy, safeguarding business conduct to ensure it is moral and ethical, and keeping an eye on long-term value creation. By joining together with the international community and supporting global events and celebrations, Banyan Tree broadens its scope

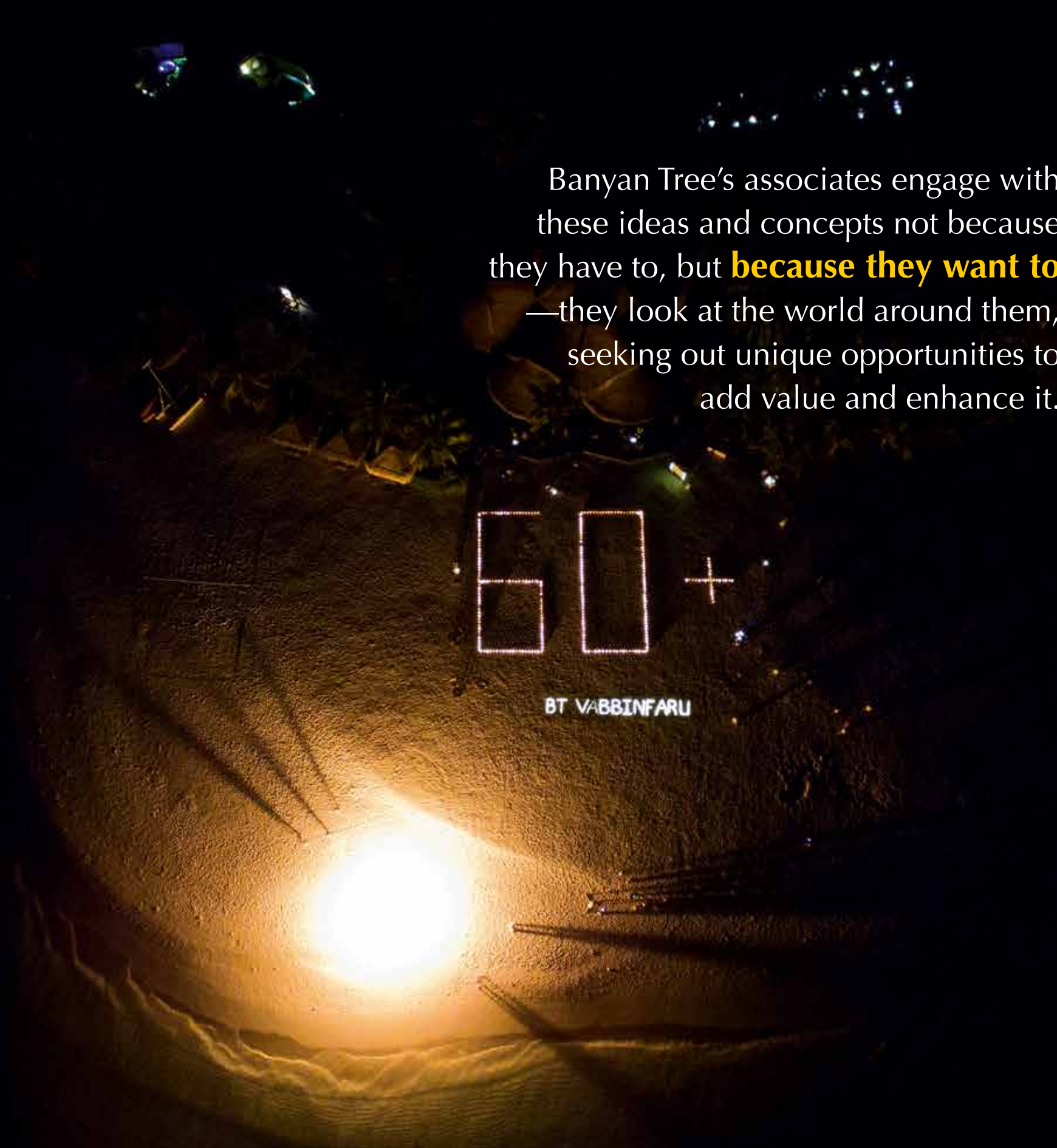
Banyan Tree's associates engage with these ideas and concepts not because they have to, but **because they want to**—they look at the world around them, seeking out unique opportunities to add value and enhance it.

of influence and engagement regarding matters relating to its core philosophy and objectives.

Earth Hour is a symbolic event encouraging people to turn off non-essential lights, in order to raise awareness on climate change. Banyan Tree first supported this awareness campaign in 2008 at its properties in Bintan and Maldives, with recent years seeing almost 100 percent of its properties showing support. The lights-out event reminds guests and associates of the power of collective action. Energy savings measured across the group during Earth Hour provide a quantifiable representation of the significant difference between collective versus individual impact: whilst one property's savings might not account for much, when all 40-odd properties are tallied, the savings are enough to power a standard home for almost a year and a half.

Other important events on the BTGF calendar include World Environment Day, Earth Day, International Women's Day, World Children's Day, World Food Day and World Cleanup Day. Each event provides the opportunity for associates and guests to engage in meaningful activities that serve as continuous reminders of the brand's commitment to sustainable development. Banyan Tree's associates engage with these ideas and concepts not because they have to, but because they want to—they look at the world around them, seeking out unique opportunities to add value and enhance it.

Aerial shot of Earth Hour celebrations on the beach at Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru. *Opposite top left:* Guests and associates coming together to share their love for the planet in Phuket.



Meeting Local Needs

“Businesses cannot succeed in societies that fail.”
– Björn Stigson, President 1995–2012, World Business Council for Sustainable Development

For businesses and communities to coexist and thrive sustainably for the long haul, the business needs to help improve the community’s overall quality of life. Banyan Tree properties, with the support of guest donations matched in kind by the company, have over the years undertaken projects that provide direct solutions to pressing challenges faced by local communities.

Nopparat “Kai” Aumpa explains the approach she takes at Banyan Tree Bangkok, where she is General Manager, that responds to the unique needs of that property’s surrounding community: “When I worked in Samui we conducted coral planting and in Bintan we ran initiatives with wildlife and tree planting. In Bangkok we cannot do these things. But we can provide education to children, the elderly, people living in the slums. Our property just received two awards, one for the vertical marathon, which supports mothers with AIDS, because they cannot give milk to their children—we have been supporting them for 18 years. “Another project supports children from the slums—we look after them, we help these children. Some children under our mentoring scheme now work as our staff in the hotel, so that is why something like this is a commitment.”

Other Banyan Tree properties regularly provide local schools with basic learning materials and teaching equipment such as projectors and computers. A computer lab and hearing aids have been provided for hearing-impaired students of Jamaluddhin School, a specialised facility



at the Maldives’ capital city of Malé, while a preschool was built on Feydhoo, an island with the lowest literary rate in the Maldives. In Bintan, toilet facilities were added to a preschool, and fans fitted in all the classrooms. Laguna Phuket’s “Fully Booked!” initiative takes learning to the road as its mobile library and classroom visits children in communities around Phuket to encourage reading and learning in a fun and friendly environment. Similarly, Laguna Lang Co hopes to close the gap on English language skills that often hinders job opportunities, through its “English is Fun” and “Let’s Talk” school initiatives, aimed at bringing young students out of their comfort zones early and getting them to converse in English with international teaching volunteers and guests from the property.

A strategic and stakeholder approach to community engagement identifies and directs aid to those most in need, not those that happen to be the closest or who speak the loudest.

Top: Banyan Tree’s Shanghai corporate office team providing educational support to children in Tenchong, China. Bottom: Ms Tina Wang has been instrumental in the Shanghai corporate office’s outreach work (left). Supporting orphans with sustenance through the Child First Fund (right).



Preserving Unique Traditions

Lijiang has until recently gone under the radar of the tourist industry. Its majestic natural beauty in the form of stunning vertiginous landscapes makes up some of the most spectacular scenery in China, and it is home to the legendary Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and iconic Tiger Leaping Gorge. Banyan Tree Lijiang is the first five-star hotel in the UNESCO World Heritage site. The villas were built in the traditional style of the local Nakhi people, boasting local materials—including pink stone, grey bricks and red clay tiles tempered in local kilns—and architectural details, such as the upturned phoenix roof and high-walled courtyards. Its indigenous inhabitants are also part of the area's charm, a unique assemblage of ancient tribes and minority communities, many of whom were once known as fearsome warriors.

Banyan Tree Lijiang signed up with EarthCheck in 2007, in response to its commitment to defend the local environment. The Lijiang property is Banyan Tree's first EarthCheck Platinum-certified resort—and only the second resort to receive such certification by EarthCheck in China. The growing partnership has also been established with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a global organisation that helps protect ecologically important lands and waters and improve human wellbeing. The partnership focuses on raising awareness of the need to preserve the fascinating culture, environment and biodiversity in the foothills of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. A charity version of the traditional Nakhi bonfire frequently held for Banyan Tree guests and associates, is organised to help raise funds for TNC, and publicise their multi-angle approach to safeguarding the environment, including re-establishing the endangered Yunnan Golden Monkey population.

Left: Traditional Nakhi dancers perform at Banyan Tree Lijiang.
Overleaf: Nakhi people selling locally grown produce in Lijiang.

Indigenous identities run the risk of becoming transformed, diluted or lost entirely. **This makes the need for empowering and engaging people on a local scale timely and vital.**



Nigel Fisher, who started his role as General Manager of both Banyan Tree Lijiang and Banyan Tree Ringha in 2014, explains how it was a lady called Lushan He who first put KP in touch with the Nature Conservancy to help find a suitable site for Banyan Tree Lijiang. "Aside from running a great restaurant, Lushan is a walking encyclopaedia, with great knowledge of the Nakhi who live around Lijiang. She is also the curator of the Lijiang traditional Nakhi orchestra. Every night she dresses in traditional costume and presents the 30-plus strong members of the orchestra to mostly tour group audiences, keen to learn about their history. Nakhi music, which is over 1,000 years old, is one of the three ancient styles that form the basis of modern Chinese classical music." Lushan is a great supporter of the Banyan Tree property and its associates, and often accompanies guests on local tours and hikes to impart her local knowledge and enrich their experience further.

Nigel also pays homage to the ancient Nakhi people's "own inherent respect for nature, the land and especially water, usually sourced from natural springs fed by melting snow. They had a simple but wise system of water usage in a structure called the three wells, which is still in use in some villages today."

Opposite: Unique architectural traditions are preserved by using local materials and adhering to local architectural styles. *Inset:* Banyan Tree supported the sharing of Nakhi culture by publishing 300 copies of Master Yang's scholarly collection of works. The author is pictured here with Nigel Fisher and associates from Banyan Tree Lijiang.

Rebecca Lan, Assistant Learning Manager and CSR Champion for the property, is extremely proud of her heritage and determined to see Banyan Tree Lijiang recognised as the most socially responsible five-star hotel in Yunnan Province. She believes that by engaging guests with the rich Nakhi and parts of Dongba culture, through simple events such as Nakhi traditional Bonfire Dance, she can help to preserve the rich culture and traditions that are unique to this remote part of China.

The need to preserve unique cultural traditions is more important than ever in our modern world where, thanks to widespread migration, cities are filled with diverse cultures drawn together from all over the world. Cultures fuse in an age of technological advancement where communication is instant and influences are spread globally, into a melting pot where indigenous identities run the risk of becoming transformed, diluted or lost entirely. This makes the need for empowering and engaging people on a local scale timely and vital.





Unity

in

Diversity

“Working in Bali has always been a unique experience because of the people, as well as the cultures and traditions that are still practiced around the island. As a hotelier, you must be aware of all these in the way you run and manage your business. Tri Hita Karana award is an achievement that proves how Banyan Tree Ungasan consistently runs the business with **full respect of local Balinese values**, as well as our own brand’s.”

ALFONSO ROMERO
General Manager,
Banyan Tree Ungasan

In Harmony with Traditional Values



artisanal craft and trade, using ancient techniques passed down through the generations.

For many cultures, respecting the environment and living in harmony with fellow members of the community is embedded within ancient philosophies. In Bali, the revered Tri Hita Karana concept for life upholds the harmonisation between humanity, environment and the creator.

Staying true to its ethos on sustainability that is embedded within its core ideals, Banyan Tree embraces diversity in people, culture and heritage, believing that a celebration of difference fosters mutual respect, which in turn enriches development in all areas. Many of its properties sit in cultural melting pots, and with over 50 nationalities contributing to its workforce, there is much to be shared and learned even within the Banyan Tree community. Naturally, individual cultural identities and time-honoured traditions are valued and celebrated at each Banyan Tree property.

In a modern world where there are more sophisticated travellers than ever before, it is critical that those working in the tourist industry act as stewards. They shoulder the responsibility to safeguard and preserve traditions and support the communities often impacted, especially those in the community whose livelihoods depend on

Banyan Tree has created somewhat of a renaissance within the tourism industry and among private businesses. Refreshingly, it respects and puts into practice traditional values in the way it conducts business: Banyan Tree Ungasan maintains the traditional Balinese concept of Tri Hita Karana alongside the group-wide ethos for sustainability and has even been the recipient of a Platinum Award endorsed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, recognising its significant achievements in incorporating sustainable, spiritual, social and environmental principles and practices to business. It only goes to show that even when faced with the reality of globalisation and other more unique challenges, businesses in destinations such as Bali can work with tradition, community and nature for long-term sustainability.

Left: Banyan Tree Ungasan is integrated harmoniously into the environment. *Above:* Traditional Balinese dance performers.

A Sense of Belonging through Retail and Furnishings

Banyan Tree strives to create a sense of belonging at each of its properties—by empowering local communities through job creation and education, and supporting artisanal cooperatives, community impact initiatives and humanitarian relief. Banyan Tree’s three wellness and retail segments—Banyan Tree Spa, Banyan Tree Gallery and Matter—uphold sustainability as a core pillar in their business strategies and support the local cultural heritage. These are quintessential extensions of the brand, promoting wellness and reinterpreting heritage textiles into “Gifts for Good” and other products. The Gallery has grown into an award-winning brand and is recognised as a responsible community retailer; the over 70 Banyan Tree Galleries now spread across the world each showcases the unique characters of native cultures, passing treasures on from generation to generation. For Claire and the team of associates involved with conceptualising the growth of the Gallery, shopping and gifting is not merely a transactional process, but a form of expression: they see it as art.

The Gallery teams play an important role in instilling a sense of belonging within each property by furnishing the interiors and sourcing for or creating the fabrics, ceramics and ornaments displayed around the resort. More dramatic touches are also found, such as the palm-thatched roofs shaped as nautilus shells at Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, or iconic Vietnamese fishing basket traps skilfully fashioned into dining booths at Angsana Lang Co’s main restaurant, Rice Bowl.

Right: Traditional handmade Xun, an ancient Chinese instrument made from clay, in Xi’an Lintong.





A Sense of Belonging through Design

As Senior Designer for the group, KC recognises that sustainable development is not only about the physical structures and elements, but also the inclusion of surrounding communities into the design and construction process. He takes the example of the flagship property in Phuket, for which they went with a full Thai consortium to complete the development, and a renowned local Thai operator to manage the first hotel at the site, Dusit Thani. By offering together a product that was in every sense but the name, Thai, they established their credentials as both serious developers and business minds. In addition to being accepted by the local community despite being foreign investors, they had earned the trust of the Thai people. The Thai royal family gave their blessings at the official opening of the resort.

Banyan Tree's growing portfolio of properties in China has been carefully curated to showcase some of the fascinating country's diverse sites and heritage. An inspired and innovative addition to the Banyan Tree Brand Collection is Dhawa Jinshanling, nestled in the towering hills at the foot of the Great Wall in Jinshanling and seamlessly fusing cutting-edge design with China's rich cultural heritage. The contemporary hotel features mortise-and-tenon woodwork, a trait fundamental to ancient Chinese architecture that enables the entire wooden frame of the

Left: Each Banyan Tree property is built and designed respectfully with the local culture in mind and integrates seamlessly into the environment—as seen here, at Angsana Lang Co, where Vietnamese heritage is proudly displayed.



building to be constructed without using a single nail or any metal hardware. The construction philosophy is said to symbolise resilience to the twists and turns of time, and interweave humans' artistry with nature's beauty. Another consideration was preservation of the centuries-old trees that stand timelessly against the backdrop of the mountains, trees that had already endured and survived countless changes of seasons and the region's especially harsh winters.

The brand's commitment to preserving local traditions and culture is best seen in their first property in China, Banyan Tree Ringha in Yunnan province.

Honoured as a Natural Geographic Unique Lodge of the World, the property sits high in the majestic mountains of Shangri-La, a sacred place for the ancient Tibetan Bön Shamanism religion. Banyan Tree purchased several 30- to 40-year-old farmhouses belonging to the local Khampas, a tribe known for their warrior spirit and rich diverse culture. Each handmade farmhouse features distinct local characteristics, such as the dragon pillar, the signature of every home there.

Each house was first dismantled piece by piece, before being transported to the new site. Reassembling the houses took

longer, because of additional walls and structural support, and the installation of bathrooms and fixtures. Reconstruction was undertaken using the time-honoured tradition of piling and interlocking, matching each individually numbered log back together. Tools were minimal and most of the construction depended upon simple physics, teamwork and pure muscle. Much like the construction of Dhawa Jinshanling, hardly any nails, screws or bolts were used and everything was assembled entirely by hand. By conserving and recycling, instead of building from scratch, no newly cut timber was required, and that the original character of the homes was kept intact.

The original occupants of the farmhouses built themselves bigger houses, using sale proceeds and timber collected over the years. Neighbours came together to create their new homes, making this close-knit community even closer than before.

China's deep philosophical sense of balance between humans and nature has also influenced other properties' interactions with their surroundings. Banyan Tree Teng Chong and Chongqing Beibei utilise natural hot springs as an environmentally conscious method of thermo-regulating water temperature in guest villas. Banyan Tree Yangshuo includes a rain garden to assist in seasonal water collection. Banyan Tree Huangshan strives to protect the natural landscape, with 30 percent of it boasting preserved open space.

Opposite and right: Banyan Tree Ringha was built by dismantling local houses and rebuilding them piece by piece, working with a skilled local workforce.



China's deep philosophical **sense of balance between humans and nature** has influenced Banyan Tree properties' interactions with their surroundings.



Banyan Tree Ringha in Yunnan province, the brand's first property in China and a *National Geographic* Unique Lodge of the World, sits high in the mountains of Shangri-La.

Beyond a Sense of Belonging

In Lang Co, a novel initiative from Director of Golf, Adam Calver, led to the creation of an “Edible Golf Course”, three hectares of terraced rice paddy fields that have been cultivated by Adam and his team, in the otherwise wild vegetation surrounding this award-winning 18-hole course designed by golf legend Sir Nick Faldo. Adam explains: “Our goal was to bring something to the course that had a direct connection to Vietnamese culture, and that was also beneficial for the environment.” A water buffalo family of three—dad Tu Phat, mum Chi Chi, and their calf Bao—help to manage the rice paddies by eating the excess weeds and crops in the area that would otherwise require machinery and manpower to maintain. The rice harvested twice a year from these paddies can yield up to 30 tons, and is donated to local orphanages, families and the elderly in the area. Paul Jansen, who assisted Sir Nick Faldo with the design of the course, finds it unusual for its “potential to give back to the community in a sustainable and regenerative fashion”.

Lang Co is a sleepy fishing town sitting between the bustling city of Da Nang and the heritage city of Hue. Not a lot happens in Lang Co, but since Banyan Tree’s entry into this enchanting region of Vietnam, the

local economy has steadily profited from its presence. All associates employed by Banyan Tree are offered free housing, and the resort runs buses that shuttle staff to and from local towns and farms throughout the day. In the township of Lang Co, around 300 rooms have been rented out from hotels that would normally cater as pit stops to the traffic passing through.

Come evening, Banyan Tree associates enjoy the local favourite Bun Bo, a simple noodle soup, or splash out a little on fresh seafood in the few “floating cafés” found over the sea lagoon. In this sense Banyan Tree has developed a form of sharing or circular economy, where even the wages paid out to associates make their way into the hands of locals not directly employed by the group. This reflects the communal nature of Vietnamese traditional culture as well as the business ethics of Banyan Tree, who might easily have built staff accommodation within their own 280-hectare plot of land.

Right: Laguna Lang Co occupies 280 hectares of virgin beach and lush tropical rainforest and is Vietnam’s first world-class integrated resort. It is also the first development in South East Asia to become certified under EarthCheck’s Precinct Planning and Design Standard.





“Our goal was to bring something to the course that had a **direct connection to Vietnamese culture**, and that was also beneficial for the environment.”

ADAM CALVER
Director of Golf, Laguna Lang Co

Mrs Ty owns a small family business at the side of the main road in Lang Co, a quaint hut with a few plastic chairs from which she sells coffee, drinks and snacks. She emphasises how much the area has grown, both in terms of size and opportunity, since Banyan Tree first opened its doors: she can now consider sending her children to better schools in the cities, for better shots at a brighter future. To her, “there is no other company working with our community and local businesses in this way”, and she hopes that when more competition arrives, they consider their impact on local people’s lives in the same way Banyan Tree has.

Thi Nguyen, a teaching consultant and volunteer at Da Nang social centre, began art therapy classes in 2015 for youngsters suffering from mental impairment such as Down syndrome and physical disabilities such as hearing and speech loss, with funding from the government, NGOs and private donations. A collaboration with Banyan Tree’s property in Lang Co to pioneer an exhibition of art pieces made by the young people, “Silent World Exhibition” helped influence similar programmes in the more local Nuoc Ngot Social Protection Centre (NNSPC). Tragically, there is an especially high rate of disabilities among children in the local region, and across other parts of Vietnam, caused by exposure to Agent Orange used by American forces during the Vietnam War. Much of the artwork on display at the exhibition offers an intimate insight into the vivid imaginations of these silent yet complex minds. The programme

has touched the lives of many associates at Laguna Lang Co, with artwork from the exhibition proudly displayed around the property and in associates’ offices.

The naturally uplifting temperament of the Vietnamese is deeply moving, given the country’s turbulent history. Banyan Tree’s belief in unity through diversity and its acceptance ethos pays homage to their strength and resilience, providing support to the local population where it can.

When it comes to sudden occurrences or unforeseen events, communities are often forced, at short notice, to draw on their own resilience. Natural calamities and global crises require swift coordinated relief. Over the years, Banyan Tree has striven to reduce social and economic impact by engaging with strategic partners and leveraging its strengths and resources in recovery efforts. To increase social resilience, associates at Banyan Tree properties have helped support victims of tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and flooding in numerous countries, including China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Indonesia and Mexico, whether by providing basic items, or by rebuilding and repairing. In these more urgent ways, Banyan Tree acts as a force for good for the community in the face of adversity.

Right: Catholic sisters and Banyan Tree associates collaborate to provide art therapy classes to handicapped children at a local social centre in Lang Co.





Strength and Resilience



From Adversity to Recovery



On Boxing Day morning in 2004, then 71-year-old Somsri Manabood is sitting out on the veranda of her small wooden bungalow, enjoying the fresh early morning air in Phuket. Her daughter, Taksaya Manabood, is inside tending to housekeeping. Somsri can't help but notice something on the grounds of her house: it looks like a water pipe has burst nearby and now floods the grassy area around her veranda. Bemused, she stands up and peers out from her perch. Water can be seen well into the distance, streaming past her bungalow in this small, quiet neighbourhood. She catches a few other faces, similarly gazing out, bewildered by the spectacle. In just a few moments, the water is now gushing, charging towards the bungalows and rising at an alarming rate. Some of the faces come down from their huts, attempting to wade through the murky water. Pieces of debris crash past like rafts that have lost control in the rapids. A few people lose their footing and are swept off into the distance.

As frothing torrents reach an almost terrifying state, Somsri and her daughter brave the flimsy steps leading down from her small wooden bungalow, clutching at its fragile railings. At the

last step, both Somsri and Taksaya are pulled off their feet by the foaming carpet of rubble, debris and saltwater. Loud crashes suggest bungalows have just collapsed. Whether or not it is theirs will remain unknown for another few days.

Three days passed before community members were able to return to that area and confirm how badly homes had been impacted by the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004. Fortunately, having been carried towards higher ground and managing to break free from the torrents, Somsri and her daughter were safe and sheltered at a local mosque with friends and other dispersed community members. Men returned to the area to gather what they could find amongst the debris. Most houses had been flattened and scattered by the waves, including Somsri's. In the aftermath of the ordeal, the whole island of Phuket was flooded, and all were shaken. Neighbouring communities, NGOs, government officials and businesses of all sizes now pitched in to help. The recovery process was arduous, but amidst the rubble and chaos, hopeful faces got to work, rebuilding homes and restarting their lives, patching up buildings that had been swept off their foundations like cardboard cutouts.

Near to Somsri's house, Gordon Curry, a professor of geoscience from the UK, was on holiday with his wife Gillian at the Dusit Thani Hotel within Laguna Phuket Resort. Among the time stamped images captured on his wife's digital camera are poignant scenes of destruction, peopled by the many who narrowly avoided death that fateful day.

Left: An image captured at Dusit Thani by Dr Gordon Curry, in the moments following the 2004 tsunami. *Above:* Somsri Manabood sitting on swings next to her bungalow, rebuilt by Laguna Phuket as part of the Recovery Projects.

Professor Curry had spent the past 20 years teaching university students about the environmental impact from natural disasters, yet nothing could have prepared him for the high-magnitude earthquake that would shake the lives of so many that day. In the immediate aftermath, many guests understandably chose to leave for home. Others, including Professor Curry and his wife, decided to stay and help in any way they could.

Nearly 15 years later, Professor Curry reflects on the tragedy he and his wife witnessed. Pointing to pictures he captured of bent solid iron bars and the crumpled wheel of a bicycle, he describes the event as “a graphic demonstration of the catastrophic impact of a major tsunami, not just due to the water itself, but all of the debris that it picks up and carries along with it.” On that day, “whether by design or good fortune”, he and his wife were able to retreat from the waves: “The wing of the hotel where I was staying was not even touched by the waves, even though it was directly in their path.”

Amidst the immediate chaos, Laguna Phuket management tried to piece together what had occurred. Hundreds of thousands in the region had lost their homes, their families and friends, and their own lives. There was also cause for concern over members of the Laguna Phuket management and some relatives who were still missing. A group of 19 had over the Christmas holiday break gone camping on the nearby island of Surin, catching a ferry that was right in the tsunami’s path.

With communication impossible, nobody knew of their fate. Management and staff persevered.

Top: A wall of missing person posters and floral tributes following the tragic tsunami in Phuket. *Bottom:* Scenes of the horrifying destruction wreaked in Phuket on Boxing Day in 2004.



Despite flooded kitchens and no electricity, sandwiches and bottled water were laid out by the afternoon for guests at the hotel. On top of this, pickup trucks laden with water and food were dispatched from Laguna Phuket to temporary evacuee camps in neighbouring provinces, some of which had faced a wall of water over nine metres tall. On 27 December, word came through that all 19 of the missing people had been rescued and were now safe and bound for Phuket’s sea port. The reunion was one of mixed emotions, as another vessel unloaded body bags from the holiday island of Phi Phi beside them. For the survivors, they found most comfort in learning the whole of Phuket was not “gone”, as they had been led to believe.

It is often the perception of and response to challenges that defines a business. Banyan Tree has demonstrated tremendous resilience and strength in the face of adversity, time and time again. It has stood side by side with its long-term stakeholders—its associates and communities—to confront hardships, whether collective or individual.



From Laguna Phuket, the entire staff and management of some 3,000 undertook to donate five percent of their salaries for the month following the disaster, with a voluntary surcharge of US\$2 on the room rate being matched by management under the auspices of the Green Imperative Fund (GIF). In an organic fashion, the five resorts making up Laguna Phuket at that time quickly came together to form the Phuket Tsunami Recovery Fund. At Banyan Tree's headquarters in Singapore, a similar fund was created to offer aid and show solidarity throughout Asia. Managed by a committee, funds were allocated to specific relief and recovery projects scouted by representatives on the ground.

A total of 19 projects were undertaken by the team, by tapping on the Phuket Tsunami Recovery Fund. Some were smaller and more urgent, to meet the basic needs of victims. Other projects were larger and helped with rebuilding structures. One of these projects based in Bang Tao involved rebuilding 11 homes and repairing 65, including the home of Somsri Manabood, who at 86 still lives there with her daughter. "Banyan Tree gave us our home back! It comforts us living close by them, having witnessed the support offered to our community at that time." Even today, regular community visits are made by associates to check on the wellbeing of survivors like Somsri. In other areas, such as Surin, Khao Lak and Kamala, where the damage was more severe, a mosque and more homes were repaired and rebuilt, wells restored, refrigerators and mattresses purchased, and kitchens equipped with cooking appliances.



All across the Indian Ocean, similarly overwhelming demonstrations of compassion were afoot. The Maldives is the lowest lying nation in Asia, its highest natural point standing at two metres above sea level. The tsunami washed over the islands with ease, during the busiest tourism period of the year. Due to the natural formation of the atolls, most islands were spared from serious damage, compared to the scale seen in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Indonesia. Nevertheless, there was considerable damage and loss of lives.

With three properties in the Maldives, Banyan Tree's recovery efforts were highly focused and impactful. On the day of the tsunami, Abdulla Simaad, Executive Assistant Manager of Angsana Ihuru in North Malé Atoll, remembers seeing the water rise higher than he ever imagined possible. For the first time in his and probably all of his fellow Maldivians' lives, he watched as the sea level relentlessly continued to rise and infiltrate the island. "We didn't know the word 'tsunami' until we watched the news later. When it happened, we thought it was natural. We heard that the sea level is rising and because Maldives is a low-lying nation it will one day be washed away, and so we thought it was now happening. We were all very scared."

Opposite, top: Youngsters look upon a wall of missing persons. *Opposite, bottom:* New Laguna Centre was created to facilitate Bang Tao community projects, such as teaching traditional skills. *Right, top:* New housing built with the Laguna Phuket Recovery Fund in Koh Sireh. *Right, bottom:* Claire Chiang pictured with Laguna Phuket associates and members of the community, pledging their support for recovery efforts.



When the waves are hitting the beach, what do you do?

You anchor.

You put your feet down to the sand.

**You hold hands together so you're stronger,
forming a defence wall — you anchor and support...**

If you try to move forward, you'll be swept by the waves.

If you try to move backwards, you lose your balance.

The thing is, if you don't move, you'll hold
together stronger, resistant to the onslaught,
and tilt your head above the water.

And that's what happened.

CLAIRE CHIANG

*in **Pride of Craft**,*

20th Anniversary Commemorative Book, 2014



Above: Ex-GM James Batt and the Governor of Phuket, flanked by Claire Chiang on the right and daughter Ren Yung on the left, in solidarity with others at the Bang Tao memorial ceremony.

Within hours, every tourist in the Maldives was trying to leave the country and most resorts were empty, except for staff. Thankfully, islands such as Angsana Ihuru and Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, located safely within the centre of a shallow atoll, saw fairly minor damage and few injuries. However, other islands in close proximity to deeper water found at the edges of atolls, such as Angsana Velavaru and its neighbouring islands in the south, were far more severely damaged, with a number of casualties.

Simaad remembers most of all the camaraderie and teamwork that arose. The greatest damage had been to the jetty, so staff members from housekeeping, food and beverage, and management came to help knock the wooden planks back into place. Within a day it was operational again, allowing them to ferry panicked guests to the airport. It didn't take long to repair the damage caused to the properties, but more serious cases of need had already been identified in other parts of the country—in particular, the locally inhabited island of Naalaafushi on the eastern edge of Meemu Atoll,

directly in the path of the tsunami. Here most of the island's inhabitants had been displaced. The drinking water was contaminated with sea water, and was thus undrinkable, and the island lacked resources to repair the damage. The United Nations had now arrived in the Maldives and partnered with a local taskforce assembled by Banyan Tree management. Spearheaded by Azeez from the Marine Lab and Ibrahim Didi, Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru's chief carpenter at that time, this taskforce mostly comprised Banyan Tree's own associates, who were able and willing to assist with the recovery efforts. Without hiring any outside help, Banyan Tree's taskforce, with resources contributed by the UN, rebuilt a total of 80 houses on the island of Naalaafushi. Simaad recalls the pride and satisfaction he and the other associates felt, at being able to offer hope and better futures for his fellow countrymen and women at that time.

Despite much of his career being focused on the resilience of nature, Professor Curry now sees that sustainability is all about the resilience of people, not buildings, landscaping or infrastructure. Looking back at his experience of the tsunami in Phuket, he remarks: "Staff had been affected by the tsunami disaster as much as guests, and must have been worried about family and friends, and yet they were working away a few hours after the tsunami struck."

Such resilience and solidarity characterised the response of the entire Phuket community to the tragic aftermath of the tsunami, as also demonstrated by how people from all walks of life came together to clear debris, clean beaches and try and put their island back together, piece by piece. Banyan Tree has been proud to support and contribute to such an unbreakable spirit.

More Challenges in the 21st Century

Banyan Tree's success is arguably defined by its proven ability not just to endure and persevere during the lows, but to make use of the down time and find a unique way to climb back up towards the highs with something more to offer and give. In the early years of the 2000s, Banyan Tree survived not just a tsunami, but a global financial crisis and an outbreak of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in Asia. Even during stages of recovery, rising political unrest, riots and severe flooding throughout Bangkok in 2011 presented more challenges. Despite it all, Banyan Tree continued to grow, making major diversifications to its business strategy, establishing the Banyan Tree Spa and Gallery and formalising its commitment to sustainability via the Banyan Tree CSR Committee and Global Foundation. Banyan Tree's people shine as emissaries of resilience, unity and compassion. Rather than abandoning their commanders-in-chief when times get tough, they shoulder the burden, making sacrifices in solidarity.

Such was the case during the SARS epidemic, which swept through Asia affecting many businesses in the tourist industry, including Banyan Tree. A scheme consisting of voluntary unpaid leave, accepting reduced salaries and even consuming less food in the associate canteens, ensured that Banyan Tree stayed afloat during this period, without terminating a single contract. Leave vouchers, transferable for stays at Banyan Tree properties, were distributed among the Banyan Tree workforce, encouraging them to travel and experience new places in these hard times, whilst simultaneously providing revenue to the properties, reimbursed for real currency once

the business recovered. During this period, staff pledged their commitment, and all wore a band that read: Unity in Diversity, Together We Unite.

Severe flash floods took place in Bangkok in late 2011. Khun Prattsanee Khongjitt, Assistant Reservation Manager of Banyan Tree Bangkok, comes from Ladphrao district, an area heavily affected by the floods. People were unable to leave their homes as the water level was too high. The flooding in Khun Prattsanee's district was so severe that she and her son had to use an overloaded government truck service to reach work. KP flew into Bangkok and held a townhall-style meeting at the property, assuring associates like Khun Prattsanee not to worry. Having turned down a company that offered to pay for a large proportion of rooms, KP allocated all remaining unoccupied rooms at the hotel (around 150 in total) to affected associates, free of charge, including provision of food and laundry services. Additionally, interest-free loans of between three to six months' salary were extended to those affected. Further grants were awarded on a case-by-case basis, supported by fundraising and donations-in-kind from hotel guests and the other hotels in the group in Thailand, with any additional funds being matched dollar-for-dollar by the company. Khun Prattsanee states, "It was one of the most difficult times for our family, but I count myself and my son blessed to have been helped by the company in such a way."

Right: Recovery efforts on Naalafushi Island in the Maldives following the 2004 tsunami. Banyan Tree helped rebuild 80 houses destroyed by the natural disaster.



This taskforce mostly comprised Banyan Tree's own associates, who were able and willing to assist with the recovery efforts.

Funds and donations raised by Banyan Tree, its associates and its guests, are not limited to assisting recovery and supporting victims in areas directly related to its operations. Over the years, funds have been raised to support victims of natural catastrophes with widespread effect within particular regions. On 12 May 2008, a magnitude 8.0 earthquake with its epicentre in Wenchuang County shook Sichuan province, China, affecting hundreds of thousands of lives. While Banyan Tree had four resorts operating in China at the time, all were fortunate to be located far enough away from the epicentre to sustain any damage. As a responsible long-term business partner in China, Banyan Tree stepped up to establish the Sichuan Recovery Fund.

Banyan Tree's China-based associates initiated the fundraising via contributions, which were donated for immediate rescue and relief. These funds were matched by Banyan Tree's CSR fund to provide a total of US\$23,000, shared between the Red Cross China and Mian Yang representatives, to fund immediate relief efforts and provide recovery support to the survivors in Sichuan. The properties further committed their resources and skills to the needs of the people where it was needed most, focusing on housing, education and orphanages. Long-term recovery of affected communities was provided by an opt-in donation available to all associates globally, made via pay checks; the amount donated was matched dollar-for-dollar by the respective business unit. A final facet of the Sichuan Recovery Fund was provided by guests who stayed at Banyan Tree and Angsana properties. From June to December 2008, all contributions to the Green Imperative Fund were diverted to the Sichuan Recovery Fund. As always, guest



contributions were matched by the hotel, dollar-for-dollar. At the end of the collection period, a total of US\$543,000 was raised and used to deliver significant benefits to the local communities.

Indonesia is home to some of the world's most active volcanoes, and sits along what is known as the Pacific Ring of Fire. Banyan Tree has contributed to the immediate rescue and long-term relief for survivors of the numerous earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis in the country. In 2009, Banyan Tree Ungasan raised funds to support relief for victims of a quake in Padang, before the resort had even fully opened, donating directly to the UN World Food Programme's (WFP) Padang relief effort to provide food for the survivors. This was a part of an overall support effort involving Banyan Tree Ungasan, Laguna Bintan and Banyan Tree Global Foundation, to support immediate rescue and relief via the WFP. Over the years these properties in particular, supported by additional guest and property donations, have supported longer-term community initiatives created to improve hygiene, job opportunities, education and psychosocial support for children of quake-affected communities. In 2018, a series of earthquakes caused widespread destruction and loss of life in Lombok and Central Sulawesi. Once again, associates came together in support, raising funds to help provide victims with temporary shelter, food and water, as well as assisting with the longer-term challenge of rebuilding lives, homes and communities.

Top and bottom: Banyan Tree Bintan providing support to communities affected by a series of major earthquakes in West Sumatra, late 2009.



Making a Difference,

Together



Value Beyond Business



The private sector has been called to action, to shoulder the responsibility and support where governments have either fallen behind or lack resources. Whole industries have been called to recompensate the communities and environments that had been profited from to their detriment. The space remains in its teething stages, but a few things are already apparent—there is still much to learn from one another, any effort is better than no effort, and it is by fostering effective partnerships between the public, private and people sectors that we stand a greater chance of achieving our collective goals for good.

The United Nations Millennium Goals launched in 2000 stand testament to this notion. They aimed to codify some of society's greatest challenges, including threats facing the natural environment. The eight goals—which included ideologies such as environmental sustainability, eradication of hunger and poverty, improving health and wellbeing, promoting gender equality,

and creating a global partnership for sustainable development—ran until 2015 and went on to form the foundation for the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Banyan Tree embeds this concept into its organisational governance structure as an imperative, entrenching all 17 SDGs into its framework. Banyan Tree believes that social responsibility is about creating value for a community, and that holds true whether the members of the community are employees, customers, partners, suppliers, or neighbours of the company. Companies create value by as simple an act as employment. However, businesses can take it a step further to identify areas of aligned interest with community as well as non-governmental groups, partnering together to harness core competencies and areas of expertise. Eventually, more value is created than the sum of individual parts.

“Business no longer means realising transactions, businesses must be an agency in transforming society and bringing about meaningful change.”

CLAIRE CHIANG

Left: International Coastal Cleanup organised by Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru and conducted in partnership with the Maldives National Army. *Above:* Claire Chiang speaking at the Singapore Compact for CSR supported by the United Nations, in 2006.

Banyan Tree's Green Imperative Fund (GIF) was established a year after the Millennium Goals were launched, as a means of engaging guests with the company's central values and objectives, strengthening its "Stay for Good" approach. A CSR Committee was established to direct socially responsible practices and use of this fund. Appointment of senior management from each resort helped create synergy for group-wide sustainability efforts. It ensured that in addition to addressing social and environment needs at local levels, the group could harmonise their efforts towards major global issues, such as equal opportunity and climate change. As founding signatories and members of both the UN Global Compact in Singapore and the Singapore Compact for CSR (a national society where Claire served for four years as inaugural president), Banyan Tree was able to form partnerships and help shape and develop the ways that responsible businesses could contribute towards positive change needed in society.

Banyan Tree published its first Sustainability Report in 2006. One of the report's objectives was to improve transparency of its commitment to upholding the 10 universal principles of the UN Global Compact, covering the areas of human rights, labour, the environment, and anti-corruption. Another important reason was to share its journey. By charting its progress and documenting its triumphs and tribulations, and offering up examples of its operational approach to social and environmental enterprise, Banyan Tree hoped to engage other businesses and institutions and help inspire collective action.

Right: The Banyan Tree Maldives Marine Lab was launched on Vabbinfaru Island in 2004. The first resort-based research facility in the Maldives, it paved the way for future developments in marine science in this region.



Partnerships for Scientific Research

This pioneering journey demonstrates the positive influence that businesses can achieve in transforming communities, countries and regions for greater good. As the very first resort-based research facility in the Maldives, Banyan Tree Marine Lab paved the way for scientists and researchers to visit, monitor and analyse the unique tropical marine environment found in this part of the world. It engaged, hosted, and supported peers across traditional industry boundaries to unlock synergies, explore fresh opportunities, and nurture mobility of information and resources.

The work being carried out at the facility is often highlighted in national media and is recognised both within the tourism industry, as well as among academic networks worldwide.

Together with the work carried out at Banyan Tree Bintan's Conservation Lab, partners have included non-governmental organisations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Other partners included a total of 15 universities across 11 countries, as well as leading experts in their respective fields—such as Wolf Hibbertz and Tomas Goreau for electrified reef regeneration (1996–2001), Nicholas Pilcher for satellite tracking of turtles hatched in the Maldives (2001–2004), Peter Harrison for coral spawning in the Maldives (2004–2008), Graeme Gillespie to describe the herpetofauna of Bintan (2007), Daphne Fautin to discover nine species of anemone new to the Maldives (2009) and Kyle Morgan and Paul Kench for the parrotfish's role in creating coral islands

“Our collaboration on coral reef monitoring and capacity building exercise has greatly **helped our staff to build technical and numerical capacity** on data analyses.”

SHIHAM ADAM
Director General, Ministry of Fisheries,
Marine Resources and Agriculture, Republic of Maldives



in the Maldives (2010–2013). More recently, collaborations focusing on imminent threats to coral reefs, restoration and connectivity have tapped on the expertise of renowned ecologists Nicholas Polunin, Peter Mumby, Selina Stead and Alasdair Edwards.

Following a pledge in 2016 to support the establishment of the Maldives as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Banyan Tree Maldives Marine Lab collaborated with the Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Marine Research Centre and the IUCN in 2017 to provide technical guidance, training and assistance monitoring coral reefs for the Biosphere assessment. Dr Shiham Adam, Director General for the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture is thankful to the Banyan Tree Marine Lab for its support establishing the Maldives Marine Science Symposium, a collective that brings together marine scientists working across the Maldives, to share and encourage discussion about ongoing research and findings.

Dr Steve Newman joined Banyan Tree in 2015 as the Director of Conservation and Marine Lab and explains how at the time, part of his remit was bridging the gap between the private and public sectors, and to develop collaborative partnerships with academia. His academic background in marine science, combined with his passion for sharing and educating, led to an organic approach to tackling sustainability within hospitality. He aimed to facilitate access to destinations for scientists and researchers through academic partnerships, so as to support impactful projects focused on vulnerable ecosystems or communities. Dr Newman concludes, “Business competition drives innovation and the diversity of approaches needed to tackle challenges faced by society and the environment; but partnerships are required for transformative change.”

Marine research facilities are now found at resorts across the Maldives, providing a network of invaluable data and knowledge. This helps inform the Maldivian government’s management policies and procedures for protecting these sensitive ecosystems. Additionally, it contributes towards the greater project of establishing a holistic understanding of connectivity occurring between ecosystems found across the tropical Indo-Pacific region.

Many of these partnerships have been developed through a commitment to defend and protect what is cherished within the local ecosystem, and to harness greater potential where one party acting alone cannot do enough. Banyan Tree properties without lab facilities of their own, such as Samui, Mayakoba, Phuket and Seychelles, have utilised local partnerships instead. The Marine Conservation Society Seychelles set up the Wildlife Conservation and Rehabilitation Centre at Banyan Tree Seychelles’ property, and now collaborates on protecting critically endangered hawksbill sea turtles which nest on the property’s beach and two species of critically endangered freshwater turtles (terrapins) inhabiting the wetland in the centre of the property.

The scientific advisory committee of the Maldives moderating the first Maldives Marine Science Symposium: Dr Charles Anderson (left), Dr Steve Newman (centre), Dr Shiham Adam (right).



Partnerships with Educational Bodies

A core component of Banyan Tree's signature social responsibility programmes focuses on providing pathways out of poverty through skills training and personal development, principally for people coming from disadvantaged segments of society. Due to the growing demand and competition for jobs, officially accredited and recognised qualifications from formal institutions often provide greater leverage for job seekers. Recognising this, Banyan Tree validates its programmes through formal partnerships with academic institutions and government educational bodies.

Despite initially being set up to support the business's growing need for experienced spa therapists, Banyan Tree Spa Academy (BTSA) evolved towards being a foundation, providing training without charges or fees to female applicants who show the right attitude and determination. Khun Savittree Meesuksree, Training Manager of BTSA Phuket, explains how gaining accreditation from Thailand's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health was no easy accomplishment, and yet was paramount to the success and popularity of the enterprise. The initial difficulty came from a subtle reluctance by official bodies to acknowledge the educational potential of providing spa therapy training, given the negative associations found with the seedier side of the industry. Determined to demonstrate both the integrity of the programme, as well as its potential for capacity development and female empowerment, Khun Savittree and the team conducted comprehensive reviews of what was required. The final product was a professional training programme that incorporated the physical skills



By earning recognition as an educational institution, BTSA elevated the status of therapists not only for itself, but across the spa industry, **opening doors for honest and determined women seeking a profession and career development**, as well as exciting opportunities to travel.

needed for the many existing therapy techniques, as well as theoretical understanding of anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, skincare, hygiene and general health, in addition to fundamental service skills such as language, ethics and safety.

By earning recognition as an educational institution, BTSA elevated the status of therapists not only for itself, but across the spa industry, opening doors for honest and determined women seeking a profession and career development, as well as exciting opportunities to travel. Over the past couple of decades, thanks to increased focus in society on health and wellbeing, Khun Savittree has witnessed the growing popularity of spa therapy as a serious profession, spurring the development of university faculties such as Thai Medicine.

Top: Qualified spa therapists gain skills for life. Their careers can take them all over the world, to new and exotic destinations. *Bottom:* Trainees go through rigorous training to acquire the skills needed to be a professional spa therapist (*left*). Banyan Tree Spa Academy in Phuket (*right*).



The Prince of Songkla University's (PSU) Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism became involved with the signature Banyan Tree Seedlings programme, first piloted at the group's property in Lang Co, Vietnam. This developing academic partnership brought a fresh perspective that helped develop the curriculum design and assessment process, as well as provide official endorsement for the final certificate handed to all graduates of the programme. Special interactive workshops held between the Seedlings and students enrolled in hospitality and tourism related courses at PSU demonstrate the mutual benefits to be gained by both parties.

Seedlings apprentices often come from troubled upbringings; many have dropped out of school early due to lack of financial stability in their homes, and most never considered higher education a feasible option.

When PSU hosts a workshop, the Seedlings apprentices who attend gain exposure to the extensive training facilities and first-class instruction and teaching from industry experts, as well as insight into a world they might have only glimpsed from afar. When it is the turn of Banyan Tree to host a workshop, the PSU Students are exposed to the fast-paced setting of a working five-star resort, a chance to see how theory is put to practice in the real world. As part of the agreement with PSU, the students enrolled in hospitality programmes may apply for internships with Banyan Tree, a highly sought-after opportunity for career development and vocational experience. An interesting result of the partnership is how ultimately, both routes can

lead to the same career path; while Seedlings may have come from disadvantaged backgrounds, by completing this programme, they will have caught up in many ways with their peers who have come through the formal education system.

Michal Zitek explains how the phenomenal pace of socio-economic growth in Vietnam has in some cases exceeded the resources available to support it. He mentions some of the community focus groups he worked with during his time as GM of Laguna Lang Co that aimed to address the impact of this. One key objective was establishing industry partnerships with academic institutions, to enable capacity development needed for supporting the growing number of hotels opening up across this particular region of Vietnam. Specifically, a need for programmes that offer intermediate qualifications, shorter than a three-year university programme, which are simply too long in this context. Michael worked with the William Angliss school, based in Australia, to set up a hospitality apprenticeship, involving a few days of study and few days of work each week, allowing candidates to support themselves while gradually building towards a qualification. He emphasises that "it is about creating sustainable options, for the students and their families.

The grounds of the Prince of Songkla University's (PSU) Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism. *Inset:* University students team up with Banyan Tree Phuket's Seedlings to learn about food preparation and share life experiences.

Cross-Sector Partnerships

Banyan Tree Bintan has been particularly successful in fostering effective multi-sector partnerships to cultivate sustainable development across the island. Despite only a few large international hotel brands operating on Bintan, tourism prevails as the most profitable livelihood, with a growing number of community-based tourism operators launching to capitalise on the opportunity. Bintan's Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) Forum was established to help drive this growth, via cross-sector partnerships amongst the island's key stakeholders, while balancing the interests of private businesses with societal and institutional needs. Working collectively, partners of the STD Forum strive to support mutual objectives, a crucial aspect involving education and human resource development. Henry Singer, Banyan Tree Bintan Conservation Lab's manager, talks about how forming meaningful partnerships has been critical to connecting more broadly with the island's key stakeholders: "We used to approach people for partnerships, now they mostly approach us." The reason for this change is that over time, Banyan Tree has reached out across the island to help and support different sectors of society, earning itself the reputation of a responsible business that strives to both protect the natural environment and improve the lives of the communities around it. Laguna Bintan has collaborated with Faculty of Marine Science and Fisheries (FIKP) of Raja Ali Haji Maritime University (UMRAH) since 2012, on numerous initiatives aimed at improving the community's understanding of precious habitats and biodiversity found on the island—these include mangrove restoration, coral planting and reef monitoring, sea turtle conservation. Additionally, it also supports student internships on fisheries science and conservation. In 2017, both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance collaboration, especially in developing



education, research, and conservation efforts on Bintan Island. The success of this partnership, significant enough to feature in local press, has opened doors for other faculties of UMRAH— for instance, the engineering faculty looking to create solar powered boats for mangrove tours and tap into clean and renewable energy technologies for local communities—who now reach out to Banyan Tree for more mutual collaboration.

Small-scale local partnerships can be found at almost all Banyan Tree properties across the world, be it providing food to orphanages, educational support for schools or social care for the elderly or handicapped. In Mexico, Banyan Tree's properties in Mayakoba and Cabo Marqués have focused amongst other things on partnerships aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of people suffering from illnesses and incurable diseases, especially young children. One enterprising partnership with associations such as AMANC and that is part of Tapáton Mexico's "Bottle Tops for Smiles", provides free chemotherapy to children suffering from cancer, by the simple collecting of plastic bottle caps, then selling them to recycling centres—one ton of bottle caps means 1,000 children receiving free treatment. Numerous small-scale partnerships have been established with local orphanages and care homes such as Villa Sarita which takes in children with HIV. Banyan Tree Cabo Marqués provides food supplies and hosts the children at property celebrations for big events such as Three Kings Day, Christmas and Children's Day.

Top: In Mexico, Banyan Tree's properties aim to support young children. *Bottom:* Banyan Tree's local partnerships across all their properties extend to charity events benefitting elderly care in China (*left*). Banyan Tree properties support a vegetarian festival in Phuket (*right*).



Whilst these localised partnerships are extremely effective within the context of local needs, some challenges are faced by society the world over, and the responsibility for addressing these is shared, achieving an even greater impact. The Banyan Tree headquarters in Singapore encourages a global effort from its properties to raise awareness and funds to support the Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF), a non-profit organisation aimed at eradicating the disease. The BCF focuses on awareness and education while providing support and volunteer programmes for survivors and their loved ones. October is often recognised as breast cancer awareness month and Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts partnered with BCF to raise funds for both BCF and the GIF—encouraging guests and associates to wear Pink Ribbon pins. Banyan Tree’s signature sand-filled turndown gifts were replaced with pink replicas of the starfish and turtle during this month. A strong and unified message of support for this important cause, Banyan Tree’s efforts acted as reminders of the power of collective action.

Cleaning activities have been central to Banyan Tree’s sustainability ethos since the company’s inception, with the whole of Bang Tao Bay being remediated for the development of the flagship property—initiatives over the years have focused on both the physical act of cleaning up communal areas such as beaches, riverbanks, streets and pathways, as well as raising awareness among associates, guests and community members, of the

need to look after our natural environment. Each Banyan Tree property is called upon to organise a minimum of four cleanup events each year. In 2018 Indonesia’s central government in Jakarta put out a national call for action, in response to growing concern from the international community over Indonesia’s significant role as a major polluter, especially of plastic. Renald Yude, Laguna Bintan Conservation Lab’s assistant manager, began coordinating the Cleaning Community event, which would coincide with World Cleanup Day and the International Coastal Cleanup. He put together a core team, mostly young people drawn from various sectors and industries around the island. The team managed to garner support from local schools, townships, businesses and soon even government ministries. It wasn’t long until regional media caught wind of their attempts and following the request of the Riau Islands Province Governor to join the event, participant numbers grew to over 35,000. The event was a gargantuan success, arguably the greatest supported and publicised environmental event that this region of Indonesia has seen, gaining local, regional and even national news and media coverage. It is a huge testament to Renald’s vision and determination, assisted through the successful reputation he and the rest of his team at the Bintan Conservation Lab have built over the years. The awareness created by this event will no doubt play an invaluable role in assisting local governments with ongoing objectives, vis-à-vis responsible consumption of resources such as single-use plastic and effective waste management. Together we can make a difference.

Above: Pink sand-filled turtles given to guests as turndown gifts to raise awareness about Breast Cancer. *Right:* Over 35,000 islanders from Riau Province, Indonesia came together to clean the streets, beaches and towns on Bintan Island for World Cleanup Day 2018, organised by Banyan Tree Bintan.

The awareness created by World Cleanup Day will no doubt **play an invaluable role in assisting local governments with ongoing objectives.**





A
Platform for

Possibilities



A Shared Stake in Sustainability



Following its commitment to serve as a force “for good”, Banyan Tree believes that the tourism and hospitality industries hold keys to unlocking the full potential of individuals, to be better versions of themselves and bring about positive changes that are much needed on our planet. Travelling opens people up for discovery; if these new experiences can be positive influences on everyday, conscious behaviours and attitudes, then indeed tourism can be a powerful transformative force for good.

Embedded within its philosophy of sustainable development, Banyan Tree advocates for the need to share profits and prosperity along whole business value chains. This includes important stakeholders, members of community, and local businesses and their workforces, without whom operations would grind to a halt. Their stake in the business and the industry is earned through continued support and willingness, by sharing their local culture and environment with those who wish to experience it. Banyan Tree shares the returns on this investment among its stakeholders, emphasising the possibility of doing well, while doing good.

This enforces the notion advocated by Banyan Tree of a paradigm shift from business shareholders to company stakeholders.

The last decade bore witness to intense media attention, public concern and institutional focus on sustainability issues—such as climate change, plastic pollution, loss of natural habitats and animal biodiversity—as well as human rights issues—such as child labour and trafficking, gender equality and mass-human migration. Human activities with negative consequences for the environment and people’s lives are increasingly opposed, and efforts to eliminate these practices have gained significant momentum. With many conglomerates dwarfing individual state governments in both economic power and social influence, it has become clear that governments alone cannot steer the planet towards the transformative change needed to ensure peace and socio-economic prosperity, and prevent environmental destruction.

Left and above: Banyan Tree associates across the world from Huang Shan (left) to Bintan (above) support international events and celebrations that help raise awareness about sustainability topics, such as World Food Day.

Seedlings Dreaming Big

The signature Seedlings programme was conceived to do good, while doing well, and provides not only pathways out of poverty for those born into disadvantaged sectors of society, but empowers local communities to cherish and protect what is rightfully theirs. It creates possibilities and embodies the paradigm shift Banyan Tree champions—a legacy of congruence between positive change and stewardship, that in turn brings about prosperity by transferring the responsibility, skills and knowledge into the hands of future generations. Banyan Tree's Corporate Executive Chef, Heshan Peiris, was imperative to the growth and development of the Seedlings programme in Lang Co. Working with the locals, he could see their natural talent and potential, and believed that developing the local workforce so that they would not have to rely on expatriates such as himself was simply the right thing to do.

Chef Heshan focused on challenging the Seedlings, in the same way he had been challenged during his own career back home in Australia. Heshan helped develop a menu that pushed the boundaries of Vietnamese cuisine, borrowing techniques and culinary influences from various other parts of the world. "Our vision was to prepare modern adaptations of local food—the execution and final product was completely different to anything they were used to. And all of a sudden, they felt ownership and pride in their work and their achievements." Newly robed in their signature Seedlings uniforms, the apprentices were given a fresh identity that elevated their sense of pride and empowered them in their roles, whether in the kitchen or F&B service team. The programme later evolved to include housekeeping as well, another central avenue into a career in the hotel industry.



“When guests share their positive comments, you see the young faces of our Seedlings light up—not because of their past and where they have come from, **but because they are now professionals of their own craft**, and like all professionals feel pride when their endeavours can bring happiness to others.”

HESHAN PEIRIS
Corporate Executive Chef,
Seedlings Lang Co

Heshan recalls his own pride in their determination. “These youngsters are extremely resilient, they are bombarded not only with advanced cooking techniques and service skills of a five-star operation, but at the same time attend English courses and receive life-skills coaching from other associate mentors in different departments.” These challenges, however, are what Heshan believes make the course so ultimately rewarding, and stands as the root of the programme’s success in creating possibilities for young individuals. “When you challenge people, you can find the best in them. It is important they make mistakes, from which they can learn and grow.”

Heshan observes, “When guests share their positive comments, you see the young faces of our Seedlings light up—not because of their past and where they have come from, but because they are now professionals of their own craft, and like all professionals feel pride when their endeavours can bring happiness to others.” Seedlings who have passed through the programme are given a platform to expand their dreams.

Left: Heshan Peiris, Banyan Tree's Corporate Executive Chef, was imperative to the growth and development of Banyan Tree's signature Seedlings programme.

Jade Aurora is one Seedling who dared to dream big. She showed potential in her classes at school, but like many Seedlings, her parents struggled to support her education, needing the extra income contribution for the household. Aurora graduated from high school with excellent grades and a lot of potential, but despite the encouragement of her Banyan Tree mentors to continue with her education, her possibilities were stifled. Henry Singer, Banyan Tree Bintan Conservation Lab's manager, who has played a major role in developing the Seedlings programme in Bintan, felt compelled to help his mentee. He applied for a BTGF advanced scholarship to sponsor her university degree and Aurora became the first Seedling in the Banyan Tree group to receive a full university scholarship. She was soon enrolled in the Department of Law at Airlangga University (UNAIR), one of the top five universities in Indonesia, and finally graduated top of her class.

“As a Seedling, I learned not to be afraid of dreaming, because I believe that surely there is a future hope for me, and my hope will not be severed. My family and I are very grateful for the opportunity and assistance with my studies. It really helped us.”

JADE AURORA
Seedling

Top: Bintan Seedlings with Charlie Everitt, Sustainability Manager (centre), following a mentoring class. Bottom, left: Jade Aurora, a law student at one of Indonesia's top universities in 2019. Bottom, right: Educating students in the Maldives.



Mirawati (Mira), at 27 years old, has proven herself an extraordinary talent and entrepreneur. She studied Marine Management at Raja Ali Haji Maritime University (UMRAH) on Bintan and interned at Banyan Tree Bintan's Conservation Lab in 2012, also under the mentorship of Henry. Maximising this opportunity, Mira completed a project focused on mangrove restoration, but became interested with assisting CSR and community relations initiatives conducted by Henry and the team. Having grown up in Bintan, Mira had an intimate understanding of the needs and challenges facing local communities. She began by proposing a BTGF-funded community project cultivating oyster mushrooms. Mira could see the vast potential of harnessing collaborative relationships between the growing private sector and local communities, but felt the people of Bintan were currently only observers in the industry—she wanted them to be players. With her newfound awareness and the experience gained from her internship with Banyan Tree, Mira set up her own business focused towards developing, facilitating and promoting local and sustainable tourism. She now offers mentoring to locals starting out in the travel industry, or those lacking in education who are seeking new skills such as digital marketing, budgeting and money management.

Believing human resources to be one of the most pressing challenges for Bintan, Mira explains, “It is very important to change people's attitudes and their mindsets. Individuals need to learn that they must make a sacrifice first, it is not always easy, you need to work hard to achieve.” A role model for her generation, she is keen to show that Bintan is ripe for business, and that with a little hard work, there are many opportunities for people to learn new skills and succeed. Henry supports Mira on her personal endeavours and expresses his pride, knowing that she would help inspire the next

“ There is a statement from the UN General Assembly 2017 that basically talks about the important role of tourism as a positive instrument towards: the eradication of poverty, the protection of the environment, the improvement of the quality of life, and the economic empowerment of women and youth, which all contribute to the strengthening of peace in the world. To me this quote suggests how **in tourism we can dream big; we shouldn't be afraid to fail, we should be afraid not to try.** ”

STEVE NEWMAN
Group Sustainability Director



generation of Bintan islanders. He is adamant that supporting the development of local talent like Mira is key to achieving positive growth for Bintan, and encourages future generations to firmly grasp such opportunities, branch out and achieve their own goals and visions. Mira is grateful for the support provided by Banyan Tree and Henry; she believes that her focus on micro-businesses would lead to plenty more opportunities for collaboration in the future.

Empowering future generations in these ways, to develop sustainable mindsets and inspire them to not only practice it, but preach it, runs through the core of Banyan Tree's mission.

An Inclusive Platform

Underlining the notion that businesses cannot succeed in societies that fail, Banyan Tree has embraced the concept of mutual prosperity since its conception. Beginning with the simple act of creating a safe place for children to learn and play, so that associates who were parents had peace of mind, the group has gone on to demonstrate that future prosperity for neighbouring communities is as important as the company's own successful growth. Banyan Tree has endeavoured to extend this platform for possibilities further into society, forming the Phuket Community Learning Centre (CLC) in 2007. Initially set up to develop long-term assistance for those affected by the 2004 tsunami, the CLC offers courses to any member of the local community, equipping them with fundamental skills that can help enhance their lives, including English and Chinese language classes, money management, cooking and short introductions to basic hospitality. To date, almost 9,000 people have engaged with the CLC courses since it first opened in 2007.

Banyan Tree positions itself as a stage for talents to grow, and through the establishment in 2008 of the Banyan Tree Management Academy (BTMA), based in Laguna Phuket, it provides dedicated support to its vast international workforce, encouraging individuals to maximise their career potential and opening up possibilities beyond a regular vocation. Its team of experienced training and development coaches, most with operational experience among Banyan Tree's properties, conduct detailed and well-structured courses, balancing theoretical learning with practical application in the field.

Besides courses that enhance associates' skill sets, which obviously directly benefit the company's own efficiency and success, BTMA has also provided courses aimed at improving the lives of local associates in a broader way. For example, during the challenging global economic conditions of early 2009, BTMA launched a training and enrichment programme offered free to all associates based in Phuket. Course content was driven and taught by associates, having been developed jointly by the Academy, Laguna Phuket and Phuket Polytechnic College. More than 1,300 associates registered for a total of 3,784 courses over both of the three-month terms. The courses included the philosophy of sufficiency economy, household accounting, time management, effective listening, electrical appliance and motorcycle repair, cookery, making homemade detergent and shampoo, basic Mandarin, Korean, Russian and English, computer and software applications and basic handicrafts such as floral arrangement, jewellery making, sewing and quilting. These go far beyond the regular vocational skill sets, but are inherently linked to satisfaction, wellbeing and prosperity—factors that strengthen a community's resilience against adversity and future change.



A Milestone Year

Having reached the landmark 25th year of sustainable operation, Banyan Tree committed financial aid through its Global Foundation, which will go towards improving learning environments and school infrastructure for 4,000 students in 25 schools worldwide. This builds upon one of the group's core sustainability principles of encouraging equal access to quality education for society, something which stems back to Banyan Tree's very conception and its founding of the Laguna Phuket Kindergarten.

Efforts during the milestone year included provision of learning materials such as books, computers, desks and chairs; as well as cosmetic repairs to facilities and the whole construction of schools in Laos and Morocco.



Outside of the classroom, Banyan Tree also introduced new initiatives that focus on the core values of health and wellbeing and the increasing impacts of climate change, with all Banyan Tree hotels and resorts now offering guests the chance to make a difference by dining from a meat-free menu once a week and providing associates with a meat-free day in canteens at least once a month.

Having achieved a significant 25 percent reduction in the use of single-use plastic across the whole group in the early part of its 25th year, Banyan Tree also increased ongoing efforts to reduce use of paper, introducing a variety of paper-recycling initiatives, including the turning of used office paper into gift cards, souvenirs and textured notepaper, with the help of guest-volunteers who enjoyed the creative activities.

Keeping with the theme of '25' the group also planted a further 25,000 trees as part of its Greening Communities initiative over the course of the year, bringing the total number of trees planted by Banyan Tree to half-a-million. Associates also pledged a collective 25,000 volunteer hours towards ongoing CSR activities, including cleaning, greening, blood donations and fundraising through sports events.

Official 25th anniversary galas were celebrated by Banyan Tree properties around the world in the later part of the year, with the main theme of sustainability inspiring unique activities across the portfolio. Properties were invited to showcase local culture and traditions, celebrating local heritage alongside the history of individual properties and the brand.

Many properties turned this into a week-long event, with different activities occurring on separate days, such as a fun "Olympic" sports contest in the Maldives, planting 25 native coconut trees in Koh Samui and 250 coconut trees in Bali, making hanging bird homes in Zuhai, China, picking olives whilst learning to sing traditional Moroccan songs at Banyan Tree Tamouda Bay, a turtle hatchling release in Mexico, launching 'EduTech'—a programme providing technology education to rural community children in Bintan—and charity football and golf tournaments in Phuket.

As part of Banyan Tree's 25th birthday celebrations in 2019, school facilities were renovated in Cabo Marques, Mexico (opposite, top and bottom), and a pre-school built from scratch in Angsana Riads, Morocco (right, top), among other locations around the world. Right, bottom: The teams make their entry on to the field during a charity football tournament in Phuket.



Pioneering Partnerships for Sustainable Tourism

The global mass coral bleaching event in 2016, driven by rising sea temperatures through climate change, led to widespread coral mortality around the world and across most of the Maldives. This made it evident how fragile such ecosystems are and how important it is for us to protect them. Loss of coral reefs impacts marine life and neighbouring ecosystems such as the open ocean, indicating the complexity of interconnectivity occurring in the natural world. We would be wrong to isolate such systems by assuming their collapse will not significantly impact others. This is equally apparent in society—should one sector entirely fail, we would expect a chain of consequence and impact. The role of sustainable development to strengthen our resilience towards future change is therefore as important for society as it is for the environment.

In part due to its reliance on cultural and natural heritage, there are very few business sectors that align with the concept of resilience more than tourism. A government's view of resilience is social equity and environmental quality. A typical business view is one of business continuity and reduced operational costs. But a business in close alignment with a broader governmental view can see its needs and continuity directly benefitting. Businesses may at first encounter difficulty when trying to align in this way—like technology, sustainability represents a disturbance to business operation—yet delayed adoption or response can reduce options and may result in greater disruption. Social agreements and partnerships can thus provide solutions needed for the future.

Most marine scientists currently operating in the Maldives are expatriates, in part due to the nation's lack of academic courses focusing

on conservation and research of the marine environment. Upon first arriving to work in the Maldives, as one such expatriate himself, Steve Newman, Group Sustainability Director, encountered a network of professionals who he believed were somewhat isolated geographically and intellectually; they were often hired by the private sector as glorified tour guides for fancy resorts, rather than maximising their potential as scientists and academics in the field. Through his involvement with the Marine Lab, Steve supported the formation of the Maldives Marine Science Symposium, a collaborative effort that promotes driving conservation in the Maldives beyond isolated, small-scale efforts to achieve greater outcomes.

Another shared goal of the symposium was to inspire and drive the change needed among locals, to make expatriates redundant and locals self-sufficient, much in the same way Heshan hoped to empower Seedlings through skills transfer.

“In the time I have worked as a Marine Environment Officer for the lab, **I have learned how to conduct scientific research and fieldwork, how to monitor reefs, conduct basic data analysis and raise awareness** through weekly presentations to guests.”

MOHAMAD ARZAN
Marine Environment Officer,
Banyan Tree Maldives Marine Lab

Steve also looked to ensure work conducted by researchers and environment officers remains meaningful, devising a strategy that enables contribution towards international peer-reviewed literature through academic partnerships with international universities, such as the most recent work focusing on connectivity occurring between coral reefs and the open ocean.

The Marine Lab has made it a priority to foster local talent, collaborate with local schools and support environment clubs, to transfer knowledge and empower future generations as stewards of their nation's most prized resources. Mohamad Arzan joined the Marine Lab in 2015. “When I joined Banyan Tree, I had such little knowledge of the marine environment, other than a passion for scuba diving, snorkelling and spending time observing the colourful underwater world. In the time I have worked as a Marine Environment Officer for the lab, I have learned how to conduct scientific research and fieldwork, how to monitor reefs, basic data analysis and raising awareness through weekly presentations to guests.”

Left: Connectivity between coral reefs and the open ocean has been the focus of some of the recent work undertaken by the Marine Lab.

Moving Forward

Ho Ren Yung, Vice President of Banyan Tree's Brand HQ, the unit responsible for brand development, alignment and strategy, and the daughter of KP and Claire, reminisces about her first experiences working for the company as an intern at the Maldives Marine Lab: "It truly anchored my understanding of sustainability, as living on an island was a microcosm of living on our blue planet [...] The natural world is intimately connected to our own individual and collective wellbeing, and we must see ourselves as part of this larger ecosystem." These early experiences in some ways inspired the career path of Ren Yung, a graduate of the London School of Economics (LSE), where she wrote her thesis on social entrepreneurship. She went on to found Matter Prints, a textile-focused clothing brand collaborating with rural artisans and adopting sustainable practices, that aims to inspire customers to value the importance of provenance.

Having established Matter as a successful business in her own right, Ren Yung joined the family hospitality business, bringing Matter with her as the third retail segment of the group. To her, "travel is a growing industry and as the world grows smaller through increasing connections, we hope to continue to be able to redefine what travel and exploration mean through the design of exceptional experiences and empathetic, authentic and creative hospitality." When asked what she envisages for Banyan Tree in the future, she states, "While every brand must evolve to stay relevant to the times, it's vital that it also stays true to its founding values in order to be authentic. In today's world our values of sustainability and integrative wellbeing are more urgently important and relevant than ever. Furthermore, we see ourselves as accountable to the future, and our vision is




that every stakeholder and associate feels like a positive agent of change—a steward of our brand's commitment to sustainability."

Having initially carved out her own path, Ren Yung reflects on how she returned to family business to contribute to something greater, for which she believes Banyan Tree is the perfect vehicle. She recognises the same values she was brought up with, embedded within the core values of the company. "Banyan Tree is a platform that brings out the best in each and every one of us, and activates our human potential in a beneficial way."

As our planet moves toward the future, Banyan Tree is robust in its commitment and belief that responsible tourism is intertwined with stewardship and acts as a platform for possibilities. All participants, whether staff, guests or business leaders, shoulder the responsibility to act as agents of positive transformation. Claire explains how with the current expansion plans for the next five years or so, aiming to traverse some 30 new countries, Banyan Tree can tap on its past successes and proceed to bring about positive change for good in new areas. With an entire workforce empowered by the same values, Banyan Tree is ready to show the intangible value that businesses can create for the planet, by working on a broader canvas of impact that goes beyond economic quantum. Ren Yung summarises, "The last SDG 17 of Partnership is one that we believe in strongly, as all problems require multilateral solutions."

Matter Prints, a textile-focused clothing brand, adopts many of the values that Banyan Tree espouses throughout its businesses, including creating authentic partnerships with local communities and committing to sustainable practices.

A scenic view of a mountain valley with a winding road and a river. The landscape is lush green with steep slopes and a clear sky. The road winds through the valley, and a river flows through it. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

For Banyan Tree, the message is clear: through partnerships, business and communities can create more value than the sum of their individual parts. The organisation's future objectives centre on the concept that no single element of society can bring about long-term sustainable prosperity, but all must work together in cohesion, to bring about important changes needed, and encourage positive mindsets and behaviour. As one of the fastest growing industries on our planet, tourism can play a major role in this. The key is to make sure that tourism is regulated and managed responsibly, to avoid making a negative impact on communities and the environment. This also calls for effective and responsible leadership that is channelled and engaged with at every level.

Steve reflects on how Corporate Social Responsibility was once a separate department that was more reactive to policy and mostly concerned with short-term philanthropic endeavours. "In Banyan Tree CSR is dead, long live sustainability! In contrast, sustainability integrates with all departments and is proactive to the needs of stakeholders: people and the planet."

Much like sustainable development, sustainable tourism is a holistic balancing act—it needs to factor in the extent of its outreach and impact of its local surroundings, to properly engage stakeholders at all levels, and ensure that voices and concerns are being heard and addressed. In order for tourism to transform and thrive, it must be proactive, accepting and adaptable to change. We must accept that there is no blueprint for success, and individual people, companies or even countries may not achieve success alone. Therefore, integration between society and across business sectors is needed.

Plurality has paved the way for much of Banyan Tree's success in sustaining its foundations and strengthening itself through more turbulent times. It has twisted its branches and turned its roots, searching for the best way to flourish. Steve muses that perhaps long-term legacy is secured at the cost of continued year-on-year growth, and adds, "I believe we are on the cusp of a new paradigm shift in tourism, where learning and participation is encouraged by evangelism and activism of environmental and social efforts within the industry. Tourism as a high growth sector can demonstrate leadership to the business world."

Over its 25-year journey, there is no denying that Banyan Tree has evolved—as a brand, as an operation, as a business that takes the forms of its physical presence and entities, in its many different properties around the world. However, as Sriram, AGM of the flagship Banyan Tree property in Phuket, is quick to highlight, when you reflect on Banyan Tree's remarkable journey, it is also true that nothing has really changed at all. Banyan Tree has stuck by its vision from day one, its people have remained committed and loyal to a shared ideal—Embrace the Environment, Empower People—and the personal values of both KP and Claire have permeated throughout the growth and evolution of the organisation.

Banyan Tree remains rooted firmly in sustainability, even as its branches have grown and it has flourished and blossomed. True to the spirit of the eponymous tree, the Banyan Tree brand has discovered new environments to settle in, braiding together a diverse range of cultures, peoples and histories, even while remaining a single, enduring symbol of environmental stewardship.

All it takes is one thing—one abandoned plot of land, one tree, one hotel, one kindergarten, one community. If we each start by cherishing and nurturing just that one thing most dear to us, over time we can look to expand, to protect more things, create more opportunities, build more partnerships, and achieve greater collective impact "for good".

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