

Crosswaters Ecolodge

Nankun Mountain Reserve, Guangdong Province, China

As cities like Guangzhou continue to expand outward at a rapid rate, many of China's forests are being cleared to produce building materials and make land available for new housing and industry. This pattern of development is causing environmental devastation and social disruption across China.

Crosswaters Ecolodge is a sustainability-focused hotel and resort located 80 miles from Guangzhou, China. The ecolodge consists of 53 villas and suites that sit high on a mountain bluff overlooking the scenic Ganken River. The resort operates as part of a 260-square kilometer protected forest called Nankun Mountain Reserve, established in 1984 to preserve the evergreen forest in southeastern China.

Crosswaters Ecolodge emerged in an effort to promote ecotourism and raise awareness about more sustainable forms of development. The main purposes of ecotourism are to educate travelers about healthy natural ecosystems and provide funding support for ecological conservation. These projects also enhance economic development and political empowerment of the local community, and foster respect for different cultures. As the first ecotourism destination in China, Crosswaters Ecolodge sets a precedent for future sites within the mainland.

In every aspect of the resort experience, guests become immersed in the natural environment and local community. Visitors enjoy a long list of outdoor activities such as mountain climbing, hiking, boating, fruit picking, wine tasting, and birding, which bring them into intimate contact with nature. Guests enjoy home-cooked meals made from organic produce that is grown on site by local villagers in the "Garden of Cultivation." Even inside their villas, made from locally-harvested bamboo, guests are drawn closer to the landscape with views overlooking the forest, river, or gardens.

From design to construction to daily operation, the landscape architect respected the traditions, values, and practices of the local Keija people, a community of more than 5,000 natives who live in the reserve. The Keija people rely primarily on harvesting and exporting bamboo as their main source of income. The 30-square kilometers of native bamboo forest are never completely cleared, but harvested at a pace that allows the bamboo to quickly regenerate. This practice ensures minimal environmental disruption and has enabled the Keija people to earn income on the forest for many generations. Guests of the resort have the opportunity to witness and learn from the self-sustaining lifestyles of rural China in nearly all aspects of their stay.

In designing the site, landscape architects leveraged abundant local materials such as bamboo, clay tiles, marble, and river stone, to celebrate the area's natural character and prevent additional shipments of construction materials from distant sources. The botanic and vegetable gardens, as well as other landscape areas, are designed to reflect the Feng Shui orientations and layouts practiced by locals, using only native plant varieties. Keija craftsman and artisans were hired to complete a majority of construction, stimulating the local economy and engaging the community in the development process. In many instances, expert artisans mentored local workers, enabling them to learn new skills and construction techniques that can be applied to future projects in the community.

Project Resources

PLANNERS AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

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