

TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Sustainability STORYTELLERS



AMY GASH

Custodian, Lady Elliot Island | Queensland



Peter Gash first spied Lady Elliot Island – 80 kilometres off Queensland’s coast – from the window of his seaplane over 30 years ago. In 2005, he seized the opportunity to take over the island’s lease and set about developing the existing infrastructure as an eco-tourism destination.

In collaboration with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, he successfully lobbied for a Green Zone – a no-take fishing zone – to be established around the island, extending five kilometres off shore. The island had been strip-mined for guano and had been bare of vegetation for about 100 years. Peter and his family reinvigorated the revegetation

programs begun in the 1970s by previous lessees, and set the newly-named Lady Elliot Eco Resort on the path to operating wholly on renewable power.

Fifteen years into the 30-year lease, the Eco-Resort is still a family-run operation. For Peter’s daughter Amy - his ‘Apprentice CEO’ - the island has been her backyard since she was five, and acting as environmental ‘custodian’ of the island is second nature.

“We’ve planted over 10,000 trees and native plants in our time, with another 10,000 to go. Over the years, we’ve watched the vegetation become stronger and denser. As a result, we’ve

“WE SEE OURSELVES AS CUSTODIANS OF THE ISLAND – WE NEVER TAKE IT FOR GRANTED.”

seen an incredible resurgence in bird-life, particularly in migratory birds. Now we say it’s the birds’ home – and we’re the visiting residents,” says Amy.

However it is the flourishing reef and abundant marine life – with over 1200 species of fish - that are the big drawcards.



"OFTEN WE HEAR THAT THE GREAT BARRIER REEF IS UNDER THREAT OR DYING, BUT DUE TO OUR UNIQUE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP, THE REEF ON LADY ELLIOT ISLAND IS THRIVING – AND FOR MANY GUESTS IT'S LIFE-CHANGING: WE'RE CREATING ECO-WARRIORS!"

"Our marine life seems to know it's protected, the fish are so relaxed. We're known as the 'Home of the Manta': we've worked with Project Manta for over 15 years, and they've identified over 1000 individual manta rays that come specifically to the island to utilise its 'cleaning stations'.

Without the protection of the Green Zone, those cleaning stations – where tiny wrasse provide a parasite removal service for many different fish species – probably wouldn't exist."

Each year more humpback whales are sighted and in-water incidental encounters often occur. The island is also a critical nesting site for Loggerhead and Green turtles. In addition, resort staff monitor and report any illegal fishing activity in the Green Zone.



"WITHOUT THE CONSERVATION ACTIONS WE'VE UNDERTAKEN, WE WOULDN'T HAVE A BUSINESS – AND THE ISLAND AND SURROUNDING REEF POSSIBLY WOULDN'T EXIST AT ALL: WITHOUT VEGETATION AND BIRDLIFE, IT COULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY ERODED BY THE SEA."

Living on the island necessitates a high level of self-sufficiency and a holistic approach to sustainability, from water and power generation to waste minimisation and disposal. Lady Elliot Island has been on a solar power journey since 2007 supported by various Federal and State Government funding programs. The island is now almost

powered by 100% renewables with the implementation of 900 solar panels and 240 batteries saving the burning of over 200,000L of diesel per year which equates to reducing around 500 tonnes of carbon emissions. It's a way of life for the Gash family, and they use the island's systems to educate guests on how they can minimise their own impact.

"Education is key and we use everything we can to get our conservation message across. We offer our guests free talks by visiting experts; and we offer a behind-the-scenes tour to teach about our sustainability initiatives."

Ecotourism awards garnered over the years have resulted in high levels of media coverage and recognition – including by Prince Charles, who chose Lady Elliot as the site for a global conservation awareness Round Table meeting in 2018.

"We are reaping the rewards of our custodianship: we're at over 95 per cent capacity six months in advance and we have a thriving ecosystem. We've put a lot in, but we're getting it back a hundred-fold." 

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The high conservation values of Lady Elliot attract the best staff, currently including five Master Reef Guides, recognised as the world's leading reef guides, interpreters and ambassadors by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

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