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THE NATURE ISSUE

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TASMANIA

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THE LOST WORLD

A hidden gem surrounded by lush rainforest and rice fields, Nihiwatu on Sumba Island bathes you in serenity and allows you to reconnect with unspoilt nature Writer Vivienne Tang

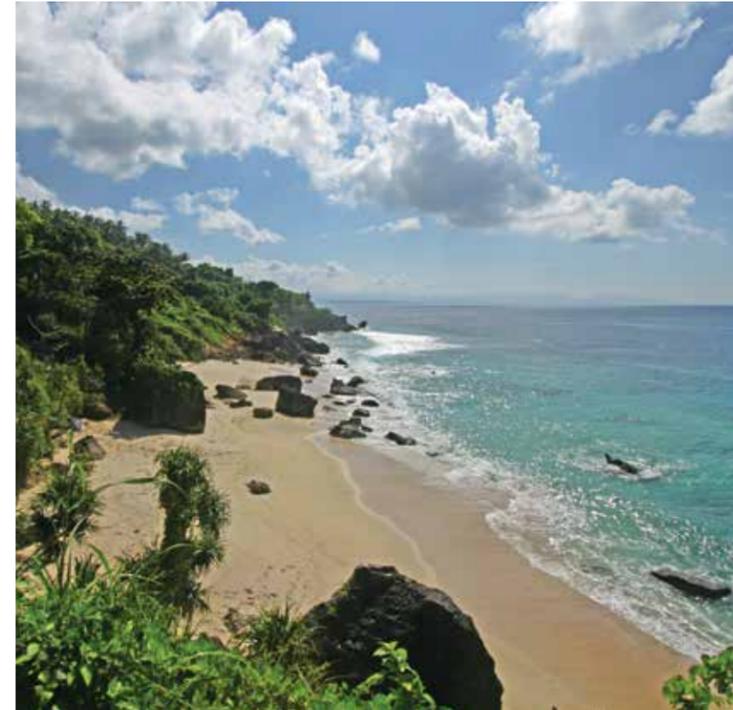
It would be a complete understatement to try to compare Nihiwatu to any other place on this earth, for it is truly unique and out of this world. And perhaps describing it as an ethereal and verdant fairy tale or an exotic version of a Tolkien Middle-earth would only attempt to do it justice.

Nestled along a secluded beach on Sumba Island in eastern Indonesia, Nihiwatu is marrying untouched nature and once-in-a-lifetime adventure experiences with refined luxury travel, completely reinventing the mere definition of indulgence.

As soon as the plane touches down at Tambolaka's tiny airport, which consists of little more than a conveyor belt, and where you're greeted with a refreshing cooling towel and a big coconut to quench your thirst, you are whisked away on a one-and-a-half-hour journey through the thick Sumba forests and the Rijewa mountain range at 500 metres above sea level, to finally arrive at the very top of the estate where an untouched coastline is spread out in front of you and a welcome sign reads: 'On the Edge of Wildness'. When the sun is out and the sky (dotted with beautiful, white, fluffy clouds) is reflected in the glistening ocean and the lush jungle calls to be explored, you can't help but try to catch your breath again as a sense of serenity overcomes you as you take in the unspoilt vista.

After a warm and hearty welcome at the resort, you're then ushered, by your personal butler (who always sports a traditional Sumbanese sword), through the open-air lobby building and down winding, sandy steps to your private villa. Each one of the 32 rustic, thatched-roof luxury villas is tucked away behind trees, creating an oasis of natural stone, teak wood, coconut shell and adorned with colourful Sumbanese ikats. The al fresco bathrooms, which welcome midnight showers under the stars, and the verandah with the outdoor pool (and one or the other monitor lizard coming to greet you) both immediately connect you with Mother Nature, blurring any lines between the guest and the wild. And if you're staying in one of the Wave Front Villas, secluded privacy (perfect for honeymooners) and undisturbed views of the Indian Ocean from your very own bale will make your stay an utterly romantic, memorable and a difficult-to-top holiday.

Nihiwatu's appeal – and perhaps its secret to success – lies in its profound connection to the island and its inhabitants. Through support of the Sumba Foundation, which works on eliminating Malaria on the island, as well as offering eye operations, clean water and education, Nihiwatu's humanitarian efforts and the guests who have stayed at the resort have brought immense positive change to



Sumba Island.

But the philanthropic contributions don't stop there. Nihiwatu also prides itself in doing its share towards turtle conservation by buying turtle eggs from locals above the average market price to nurture them at the resort's hatchery, making sure that they have a destiny in the ocean.

Activities abound, you can enjoy long delicious lunches at Nio on the beach or indulgent dinners at Ombak perched atop a cliff, both serving the freshest sustainably caught fish, or you can choose between volunteering at the local school and exploring the Sumba Foundation clinic, or throwing yourself into some adventure sports and surfing The Wave (Nihiwatu is committed to a ten-surfer quota, ensuring that you have the ultimate experience at one of Indonesia's top surf breaks with cult status), going spear fishing or on a dive excursion, trying stand-up paddleboarding through remote villages, enjoying horse riding along the untouched beach at dusk, immersing yourself in a sunset yoga class at the al fresco yoga pavilion atop the ridge of the resort while taking in the breathtaking 360-degree views as the crimson sun turns the entire sky into a beautiful canvas of violet, orange, yellow and turquoise hues, or simply rekindling your relationship somewhere along the remote two-and-a-half-



OPENING PAGE: The Spa Safari at Nihwi Oka offers once-in-a-lifetime experiences. THIS PAGE: Nihwi Oka's pristine beach; beautiful bedroom with pool view at Nihiwatu. OPPOSITE PAGE: Reconnect with nature at Nihiwatu through meditation and yoga

kilometre-long Nihiwatu beach.

And if you've tried all of the above and you're hungry to explore more, don't miss out on a trek to the Blue Waterfall where you indulge in a chilly dip in the lagoon, or go on a 90-minute trek through local villages and over rolling hills to the awe-inspiring final destination of Nihwi Oka where the Spa Safari will pamper you into oblivion. Surrounded by lush rice paddies and nestled between two deserted beaches, you will enjoy brunch in a tree top setting, spend the afternoon on the beach with your loved one or in your personal cliff-top bale, and end your day with a foot or a body massage to



THIS PAGE: Enjoy the sun and pool at Nihiwatu. OPPOSITE PAGE: Trek to the Blue Waterfall and have your breath taken away by the untouched beauty of nature here; surf The Wave at Nihiwatu

the sound of waves crashing on the beach below you. Currently there are only spa bales available at Nihi Oka, but a villa is set to open in September, allowing guests to wake up to this luxe version of Robinson Crusoe's island.

All experiences are curated in a way to include the rawness of your natural surroundings, which will leave you satisfied and fulfilled not only on a physical level but also emotionally and spiritually. And it is this original and down-to-earth essence, once cultivated by husband and wife founders Claude and Petra Graves, who back in 1988 pitched a tent on the shore of Sumba and went on to build Nihiwatu, which is still prevalent throughout the entire property. In 2013, the couple was ready to move on and sold the resort to American entrepreneur Chris Burch who then brought on veteran hotelier James McBride as partner, and together they've managed to give Nihiwatu the luxurious revamp it deserves, without sacrificing any of its philanthropic or conservation efforts and staying true to the original philosophy of keeping some of the 560 hectares of tropical forest undeveloped, allowing guests to revel in and resonate with the purity of this untouched speck of land.

A journey to Nihiwatu can easily be arranged through a luxury tour operator, such as Lightfoot Travel, who will coordinate and organise all the details of your programme down to a T. But once at Nihiwatu, each guest is free to do everything or nothing, and that is the true luxury that makes this resort such a favourite among returning guests – it's the freedom to choose and to completely



express oneself. There is stillness, but there is also adrenaline. There's extravagance, but there's also nature's rawness. Removed from the burdens of society and one's daily grind, and one with the earth again, guests connect with something untouched within them and often find themselves in the middle of nowhere. Enthralled by and nurtured by the beauty of nature, guests can return to their homes again, knowing that there's always this special corner of the earth that rests deep within their hearts. www.nihiwatu.com

Nihiwatu can be booked through Asia-based luxury tour operator Lightfoot Travel, renowned for creating bespoke, inventive and one-of-a-kind travel itineraries. Packages are inclusive of all meals, non-alcoholic beverages, tax and service charge. Contact Lightfoot Travel at (852) 2815 0068 (HK), (65) 6438 4091 (SG) or visit www.lightfoottravel.com to book your stay.