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The zero-carbon luxury beach resort

Gemma Bowes, The Observer Sunday January 14 2007

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With designs on the future ... An impression of the first zero-carbon resort

The world's first 'zero-carbon' five-star resort is being developed by architects in London.

The developers of the resort, due to open next year, claim it will have no negative environmental impact and each of its 35 villas will be totally self-sufficient, using only energy from the sun and wind and producing little waste or carbon emissions.

The only drawback, environmentally speaking, is its location - thousands of fuel-guzzling miles away in Nungwi, Zanzibar.

'We have to accept people will fly there, but we will offset their flights, and our guests will be choosing an eco-friendly resort when they get there,' says Richard Hywel Evans, the British architect behind the resort. 'Carbon neutral is very difficult to achieve. What goes into the hotel must be available locally and plentifully, and what comes out the end must not damage the environment.'

The resort's design incorporates many ingenious, energy-saving tricks. The infinity pool in front of each villa will use water that has been naturally filtered by reeds in an adjoining pool.

To create natural air-conditioning, the villa walls will be shaped to draw

the sea breeze into the bedroom, after being cooled by passing over the pool. Cold water pipes will run through the inside of the bed to cool it, and each villa's water supply - from rainwater and desalinated seawater - will be stored in its own tank. Hot water comes from pipes which run beneath the solar panels on the roof, and so are naturally warmed. Waste water will be reed filtered and recycled.

The resort will be built from local earth, renewable timber and reclaimed stone; the 100 staff will be given bicycles, and electric cars will transport guests to and from the airport.

Luxury has not been sacrificed to environmental goals, and Hywel Evans hopes guests could visit without realising the resort is low-carbon. There will be a spa, a large swimming pool and a solar-powered restaurant, which will use food from its own farm and put waste into a biomass generator to produce energy. When guests use the gym's machines, the energy they produce will feed back into the electricity supply, and any surplus will be sold to the national grid.

The Nungwi resort is unique in that it will be the first high-luxury development that aims to be carbon-neutral. The owner is Per Aquum, the brand behind some of the world's most luxurious resorts, including Huvafen Fushi in the Maldives. 'To begin with they were totally uninterested in doing an eco project, but now they love it,' said Hywel Evans.

Although he says the project is still 'embryonic' and he has not even been to the site yet, Hywel Evans is already working on a design for a similar project in Brazil.

Justin Francis, chief executive of travel agent Responsibletravel.com, said there was a growing demand for such 'zero-carbon' hotels, but that they should also help the local community. 'They need to source local produce, employ and train local people on fair wages, and support local environmental and social projects,' he said.

Per Aquum aims to do that at Nungwi. The resort will be staffed and built by local people, who will be offered training and education so they can go on to obtain more lucrative, white-collar jobs in offices in the city, if they wish.

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