



How Remote Island Retreat NIHI Sumba is Setting the Standard For Sustainability



Photo by Tania Araujo, courtesy NIHI Sumba

[NIHI Sumba](#) sits at the far end of an expansive untouched beach on the southwest corner of the remote island of Sumba in [Indonesia](#). While getting to the resort requires more than 24 hours in transit to reach the resort (including the final one-hour flight from [Bali](#)), guests willing to make the trek are rewarded with an unforgettable setting: more than 500 acres of verdant jungle, mountains and a mile and a half of private beach. Here, ex-race horses wade freely through sparkling turquoise waters and a light breeze whispers through the towering palm trees and lush rice terraces. A collection of 27 thatched roof villas and treehouses—all minimally, yet tastefully designed—NIHI Sumba lives up to its five-star promise of rugged luxury, but remains truly authentic and unique.

Contact [Indagare](#) or your Trip Designer to learn more about planning a trip to NIHI Sumba and Bali, plus more Balinese resorts that might be right for you—and [how you can make an impact](#) when you travel with Indagare.



Praijing village on Sumba. Photo by Tania Araujo, courtesy NIHI Sumba

Now owned by American entrepreneur Chris Burch, the resort (also an [Indagare Index](#) property) draws surfers and water sports enthusiasts from near and far (who come to experience Occy's Left wave and its expert "watermen," who lead adventurous excursions, including diving and fishing); along with spa goers, who come for the heavenly Nihioka Spa Safari and the spectacular wellness and yoga pavilion set atop a bluff overlooking the jungle and the Indian Ocean. There are also those who come to learn more about the island's famous Sumbanese horses, through experiences at the Sandalwood Stables with horse whisperer Carol Sharpe. (The people of Sumba believe their souls are connected to these island horses.)

On a recent scouting trip to Bali and Sumba, I was especially excited to experience this magical resort (and the bliss that awaited me on my Spa Safari). The food, the service, the staff (and the daily happy hour and themed dinners) all contribute to the resort's decidedly jovial and relaxed atmosphere—it felt to me like an island home away from home. But, during my time there, I saw firsthand that what really sets Nihi Sumba apart is the resort's strong focus on sustainability and its steadfast dedication to giving back to the local Sumbanese community, while respecting and helping to preserve island traditions. Just as the island's remote location is beautiful, it is also isolating for the island's people, which has caused wide-spread and extreme poverty. Since its opening in 2001, NIHI has single-handedly kickstarted the island's economy and aimed to improve the quality of life for those living on the island. Around 90 percent of the staff

on-property are Sumbanese, and many more islanders have been employed through the food supply and materials needed to maintain the resort's upkeep and operations.



The Sumba Foundation. Photo by Tania Araujo, courtesy NIHI Sumba

By far NIHI's biggest contribution, however, is through its partnership with the [Sumba Foundation](#). This non-profit organization was started by Claude and Petra Graves, the original founders of NIHI Sumba (formerly known as Nihiwatu), who teamed up with one of their early guests—now the foundation's president—Sean Downes. In 2001, the trio decided to create an organization dedicated to improving the lives of the local people of Sumba. Today, their personal contributions, along with thousands of donations by the resort's staff and guests, make NIHI the single largest donor to the Sumba Foundation.

Unlike many hotels—which are built with little consideration for the local environment—NIHI Sumba gives back to the community. Since its inception, the Sumba Foundation has helped over 45,000 islanders gain access to clean, potable water, and has eliminated malaria on the island by up to 93 percent. It has also greatly improved the health of over half a million locals by providing and ensuring better access to healthcare and nourishing food.

While on-property, it is possible and highly encouraged to take a Sumba Foundation

Tour to learn more about the project. On a half-day excursion, you'll visit one of the foundation's many ground-breaking water projects, stop in at a malaria clinic and/or head to a local school to partake in the foundation's lunch program and to meet the children from the island.



The Sumba Foundation. Photo by Jessica Rodrigues, courtesy NIHI Sumba

Winding your way along the island's dusty roads in NIHI's outfitted safari vehicles, almost every single person stops to wave and call out a cheerful hello. Never in my life have I experienced anything similar. To witness the positive impact of the foundation on the island is incredibly moving, and the energy and love that the locals have for NIHI Sumba and its guests is apparent. While I arrived at NIHI excited to see the resort and its stunning location, I also left feeling inspired, fulfilled and changed by its deep commitment and sense of community being fostered in this unusual place.

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- Jenny Schroder on November 11, 2022

