

TRAVEL

Vacation with a light footprint

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Number one on Roatan's Seven Wonders list is the northern hemisphere's longest barrier reef, stretching 300 km south from the Yucatan Peninsula.

Thirty-five miles north of Honduras, on the Caribbean coast, this beautiful eco-system, is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Because of its fragility, the West End and Sandy Bay Marine Reserve were created to protect the reef. Tourism businesses also strive to protect this precious resource, such as Roatan's newest resort, Infinity Bay Spa and Beach Resort in the West End.

The resort has integrated green initiatives, such as solar water heating and an advanced aerobic septic system, into their operation so they don't emit any pollutants into the ocean that could destroy the coral.

"Nature has given us a magnificent precious gift, and we must do all we can to preserve it," says Infinity Bay's Scott Bocci.

The magical undersea world surrounding Roatan offers some of the best diving and fishing spots in the world. Water temperatures average 26 degrees C year-round, visibility ranges from 15-30 metres and gentle currents make it a natural playground.

Dive spots include wrecks, walls, shallow terraces, and



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■ *New Yucatan resorts have been created in a way that protects the precious reefs and owners have integrated green initiatives such as solar water heating.*

deep fissures amongst sea turtles, eagle rays, squid and vibrant tropical fish. Fishing is also great.

Then there are the dolphins that inhabit the waters around the island. Through the Roatan Institute of Marine Studies visitors can dive and snorkel among these intelligent and playful creatures.

Between the land and the sea, nature has provided a vital transitional protector – the mangrove system, a va-

riety of salt-tolerant tropical trees and shrubs that are integral in the stability of the coastal environment.

The system is a refuge for marine life, protects the reef from sediment runoff, protects the land from flooding during storms and is a fascinating and haunting environment.

Roatan's history is the stuff of new-world legends. At one point, an estimated 5,000 pirates called Roatan home.

For more information on this tropical paradise, visit www.infinitybay.com or Tourism Honduras at www.letsgohonduras.com.