



Planet Earth's Friend

by Art Sbarsky

Hitesh Mehta

Hitesh Mehta was a graduate student at Berkeley when he first began his involvement with issues surrounding the saving of our planet. He recalls, "It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment. It was evolutionary. However, there is one instant which stands out! When I was at Berkeley and in Graduate school, I remember having done a presentation on greenhouse gas emissions and that was in 1988 and four years before Al Gore published his first book!"

Thus began a serious effort which has resulted in Mehta becoming one of the world's leading authorities, researchers and practitioners on sustainable tourism and ecotourism physical planning and both the landscaping and architectural aspects of ecolodges. A self-described global citizen, Mehta, now fifty years old, says, "My soul is from India, my hearts is from Kenya, and I live and work in America" - Fort Lauderdale to be specific.

Mehta's work and service experience in the pursuit of improving the future of the earth is extraordinarily impressive. His latest project involves the advantages of staying at authentic ecolodges; those who help conserve a local forest, contribute to the local community and attract those who are not interested in flat screen televisions and wi-fi access.

He recently completed a multi-city book introductory tour honoring his book, *Authentic Ecolodges*. The tour started in Portland, Oregon, which Mehta considers the "greenest" city

in the USA. It certainly took a lot of work putting this very detailed book together. Over the course of two and a half years, he embarked on a journey in search of the world's most authentic ecolodges. His travels took him to some of the most exquisite places known to man in forty-six countries and six continents. Through hands-on research and comprehensive interviews, he has compiled this volume of thirty-six of the world's best ecolodges. Featuring more than three hundred full-color photographs and a rating system specially developed by Mehta, it may just be the ultimate word on what makes an ecolodge truly authentic in its role of being a great place to stay as well as being good for the planet.

As the song says, it's not easy being green. But, if he were talking to school kids, Mehta would ask them "to be curious, to inquire, to question AND to become more aware of how their daily choices are affecting the world around them. Learning how to be unselfish and less homocentric is a great way to start." He would tell their parents, "to become more conscious of their own ways of living and in so doing, impart wisdom on their children on how to live simply and within their means. I would also remind them they are borrowing the planet from their children and it is their responsibility to maintain it for their future generations to enjoy."

For more about Mehta or his new book, go to his website, www.authenticecolodges.com. **LM**