


 A photograph of three children lying on a sandy beach, wearing scuba masks and snorkels. They are smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there are blue and yellow scuba fins and a clear blue ocean under a bright sky.

A Family affair

Luxury-seeking families are spoiled for choice in the Indian Ocean, finds Aby Dunsby

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Powder-soft sand, sun-stroked skies and water so blue you need sunglasses to look at it – few places in the world ooze romance like the Indian Ocean's islands, so it's no wonder they're a favourite with loved-up couples.

But once the honeymoon is over and the kids have arrived, the islands still have plenty to wow luxury-seeking parents and their children, too.

While the safe beaches, great

year-round weather and warm and gentle seas lend themselves to families with young children, plenty of hoteliers have diversified their product to offer activities and entertainment suitable for older kids too, and often on a more purse-friendly all-inclusive basis.

Indian Ocean holidays tend to be more hotel-based than most, but there's still plenty to do for families who want to venture further afield, whether

it's discovering Sri Lanka's tea plantations, dolphin-spotting in the Maldives or zip-lining at Casela, a nature and leisure park in Mauritius. And when they're all tired out, the plethora of idyllic beaches are the perfect canvas to kick back after a busy day.

► UNDER-FIVES: KEEP IT SIMPLE

Although it's a long-haul flight, the four-to-five-hour time difference makes this trip doable

for families with young kids. "I'd advise an overnight flight for parents with little ones in tow, as this will help beat jetlag," says Shamira Kaumaya-Hatt, commercial director at Sunset Faraway Holidays.

It's worth bearing in mind that a trip to the Maldives often involves transfers by seaplane or boat to the hotel, but once they've arrived, there's plenty of time for everyone to unwind or catch up on sleep, particularly



Ocean at Travel 2, recommends Heritage Awali Resort in Mauritius as a great option for clients with young kids.

She says: "Heritage offers a complimentary babysitting service from 8am-4pm, which is great if parents want to go and have lunch together." As part of its Timomo Baby Club (for infants up to two years old), the resort is kitted out with a 24-hour baby care room, equipped with bottle warmers, sterilisers, snacks and changing facilities. There's also a baby concierge so clients can order supplies such as nappies and formula milk before they arrive, and its Mini Timomo club (for kids aged three to six) lays on heaps of activities, and comes with an outdoor play area, toys and a supervised swimming pool.

Some hotels also offer discounts on travel with young children, so look out for these. Maldivian hotels Atmosphere

Kanifushi, Anantara Dhigu and Conrad Maldives Rangali Island allow kids to eat and stay free, while bookings made at least 40 days in advance will receive a 35% year-round reduction. Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa Maldives even offers special rates and free stays for kids, and Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa Maldives has free accommodation for children under 12. At the Maritim Crystals Beach Hotel in Mauritius, two children under the age of 17 also go free with two full-paying adults.

UNDER-12S: WILD AT HEART

Kids in this age group are old enough to enjoy the beauty and calm of the Indian Ocean's gorgeous beaches and its fish-filled sea, and when they're ready to burn some energy there's an impressive array of activities for them to get stuck into at the



Bubblemaker sessions involve putting on a mini set of dive gear and making bubbles just under the surface

hotels. Often these are offered as part of a supervised kids' club, while other experiences are open to all the family.

Diving is a great opportunity for parents and kids to learn together, and Maldives resort Kuramathi Island opens this activity up to children aged eight and above, with the option for parents to dive alongside them. Its Bubblemaker session involves putting on a mini set of dive gear and swimming just under the surface to make bubbles, so it's

the perfect gentle introduction for young first-time divers aged eight and nine. From 10 years and up, children can take a step further and obtain a junior diving certification, which will no doubt leave them eager to return to the Indian Ocean to test out their newfound skills.

Over in the Seychelles, the Hilton Labriz Resort & Spa has its own Padi Diving Centre that offers courses for all levels and experience types, including a Bubblemaker session for kids aged eight-plus, and it also hires out scuba diving equipment to children and their parents.

If they're not quite ready to dive, kids can also explore the Indian Ocean with more water-based activities: the C Beach Club at Heritage Awali in Mauritius allows families to use its kayaks, pedal boats and snorkels free of charge, while Les Petits Dodos kids' club (open



LEFT: Heritage Awali Golf & Spa Resort, Mauritius

FAR LEFT: Velaa Private Island Maldives

as many hotels offer crèches, such as Kuramathi Island Resort Maldives; or a nanny service, which is part of Maldives hotel Velaa Private Island's family package for kids under four. Tots rarely tire of splashing around in the water, and there's plenty of opportunity for them to

enjoy the pool at Mauritian hotel Maritim Crystals Beach, which has a dedicated toddler area, while Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa, Maldives, boasts the country's first Floating Aqua Park, set in suitably shallow waters.

Deborah Wadhams, senior product manager for Indian

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PICTURES: SILVERBLINKS.COM; KURAMATHI ISLAND RESORT



LEFT:
Atmosphere
Kanifushi
Maldives

RIGHT: Lux
Resorts

BELOW:
Maritim
Resort & Spa
Mauritius



to ages three to 12) at Shanti Maurice in Mauritius teaches water basket polo and aqua fitness.

The Indian Ocean's sporty offering for kids doesn't stop there, with hotels organising everything from badminton and basketball to bike trips and mini-golf. For budding Roger Federers or Serena Williams wannabes, Lux Resorts in the Maldives and Mauritius give kids plenty of time on court with Teddy Tennis coaching sessions. The first daily sessions are open to tennis tots, while later ones are reserved for kids aged five and a half to seven.

Even if sport isn't their thing, kids' clubs are packed with activities that'll pique their interest while giving parents back some time to themselves. Examples include Atmosphere Kanifushi Maldives, whose kids' club organises everything from

mask-making and Maldivian traditional dance lessons to cooking classes and talent shows; and Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa Maldives, which lays on crafting, painting, water games and feeding the fish.

Young nature lovers will also find plenty to keep them occupied at Maritim Resort & Spa Mauritius, which has an on-site mini farm and a giant tortoise park with a

new baby turtle nursery.

If wildlife-loving little ones want to see their favourite creatures on land too, Sri Lanka combines an array of marine life with must-see animals such as elephants and leopards, which are sure to give them a few exciting tales to tell friends when they get back to school.

Noel Rodrigo's Leopard Safaris in Yala National Park focuses kids' activities around the country's awe-inspiring wildlife, with dedicated nature walks for kids and the chance to spot birds, crocodiles, water buffalos and, of course, leopards, as the park has the highest density of these majestic creatures in the world. Accommodation here comes in the form of large, family-friendly safari tents, making it ideal for more adventurous clients looking to get close to nature.

After all those activities, kids

are bound to work up a healthy appetite, and the Indian Ocean has an impressive food offering for them to tuck into. Parents needn't worry about their kids' fussy eating habits either, as numerous hotels have ramped up their offering for younger palates, with special kids' menus, including Why House in Sri Lanka and Maritim Resort & Spa Mauritius.

For kids who are happy to try new things, Noel Rodrigo's Leopard Safaris, which has two campsites, arranges mini plates of Sri Lankan food that they dub 'kiddies' dinners'. Clients can request that their kids eat separately under the supervision of staff, allowing for a break from parental duties, and kids can eat earlier in the day if they are tired and need an early bedtime.

TEENS: GET ACTIVE

Teens can be notoriously



↳ hard to please on family holidays, so suggest an Indian Ocean hotel that combines idyllic beaches with a jam-packed activity and excursion offering – that way they will have plenty to keep them occupied, and an excuse to escape their parents if they need it.

Hotels with a teens' club are a great option, with most offering fun activities alongside a dedicated space for them to relax and socialise in. Lux Resorts is a prime example: its complimentary teen club Studio 17 lays on local dance and language classes, beach sports and adventure trips around the island, plus there are iMacs for tech-lovers, and table tennis, a pool table and a DJ zone where teens can learn how to spin the decks.

The teen club at Maritim Crystals Beach Hotel is similarly impressive: for games fans there's a Wii console, darts and table tennis, while the sports programme includes beach volleyball, aqua aerobics and boating.

Teens who want to come away from their holiday with a new skill can do so at Heritage Awali, which boasts its own kitesurfing school Kite Globing. The calm waters of the turquoise lagoon surrounding the hotel are ideal for newbies, and they can build up their confidence by venturing further out to catch some waves. There are more



The Maritim Crystals Beach Hotel teen club offers a Wii, darts, table tennis, beach volleyball and aqua aerobics

chances to pick up new tricks at Kuramathi Island Resort too: its Aqua Sports Fun Centre instructors teach wakeboarding, paddleboarding

and windsurfing to beginners.

Teens who are keen to pick up some local knowledge as well as a tan can try Atmosphere Kanifushi's cultural excursions, which take youngsters around the island to visit local communities and learn about their history. Or if marine biology is more their subject, teens can learn a thing or two about the gargantuan whale shark as part of a dedicated safari organised by Mirihi Island in the Maldives. Clients take a boat out to sea with a team of local experts who will point out passing sea life, which includes turtles, dolphins, manta rays, and – with a bit of luck – some whale sharks too.

At this age, cramming stropky teens and nagging parents in together is more than likely to lead to a family falling-out at some point in the holiday, so keep the peace by bearing this in mind when suggesting accommodation options. If Only product manager Iain Raeper says: "The family holiday market is consistently growing for us, with more and more requests for family rooms or interconnecting rooms being made by agents."

Family rooms allow teens to hang out with their parents when they want, but also offer them their own space. Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa Maldives offers various family-friendly accommodation options: the deluxe family water villa features a children's sleeping area with bunk beds, PlayStation video games and a DVD player, while the luxury beachfront pool villa is ideal for larger families as it can accommodate two adults and three children. 

LEFT: Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa

ABOVE: Noel Rodrigo's Leopard Safaris



Kuoni offers seven nights' full-board at Kuramathi Island Resort, Maldives, including flights with Sri Lankan Airlines from Heathrow from £8,299 per family departing August 9, based on two adults and two children under 12. kuoni.co.uk

Hayes & Jarvis has packages starting at £1,380 for six nights staying all-inclusive at Heritage Awali, Mauritius, during the summer holidays. hayesandjarvis.co.uk