

Passport to paradise

The Indian Ocean is worth splashing out for, but there are a few tricks to make clients' cash go further, discovers **Alice Barnes-Brown**

fine sand, five-star hotels and crystal-clear seas – there's a lot to love about the Indian Ocean, but its dream destinations can sometimes feel like they're out of financial reach.

Yet as influencers boast of bagging Maldives accommodation for less than £40 per night, clients may be wondering how to get a taste of this paradise for themselves, for less. With more Indian Ocean resorts catering to the budget-conscious, it's a win-win for agents, who can source bargains for clients and earn a cool commission in the process.

LAUNCH FOR LESS

Look out for new hotels opening, as these may be running soft-launch discounts, especially if not all facilities are open initially. Established resorts may also offer deals to attract the cash-conscious: in Mauritius, the Veranda Grand Baie Hotel & Spa has just gone from three to four stars, and a week in May leads in from only £154 per person, per night with Blue Bay Travel – including flights, transfers and breakfast.

It's also worth keeping an eye on tour operators' social media pages to find the best deals. Joshua Harford, commercial manager at Mercury Travel, says: "Discover exclusive deals by subscribing to our e-newsletter and joining our community on ➤

Oblu Xperience
Ailafushi, Maldives

PICTURE: Ismail Niyaz

DESTINATIONS

INDIAN OCEAN | AFFORDABLE STAYS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

A dhoni cruise boat; Jacuzzi Pool Villa at Bandos Maldives; Veranda Grand Baie Hotel & Spa, Mauritius PICTURE: G Adventures

BOOK IT

MAURITIUS: **Caribtours** offers seven nights at the Tamassa Bel Ombre from £1,375, including flights from Gatwick on June 10, transfers and breakfast. Get 10% off for bookings by December 14. caribtours.co.uk

MALDIVES: **Fleewinter** has a family-friendly deal for the four-star Bandos Maldives, with seven nights in May from £70 per person, per night (based on a family of four sharing), including breakfast and transfers. Flights not included. fleewinter.com

SEYCHELLES: A seven-night **Tui** holiday based at Coral Strand Smart Choice Hotel on Mahé Island leads in at £1,380 per person (based on two sharing), including Gatwick flights departing February 6, luggage and transfers. tui.co.uk

SRI LANKA: **Premier Holidays** offers a week at four-star beachfront property Thaal Bentota, including breakfast, transfers and flights, for £989 per person, departing in May. premierholidays.co.uk

KENYA: **Gold Medal** offers 14 nights at the four-star Voyager Beach Resort, including flights on June 10, transfers and breakfast, from £1,429. goldmedal.co.uk

Facebook, where we unveil our best offers including exclusive free-week holidays, huge booking discounts and incentive schemes."

PICK THE PLACE

Whereas the petite isles of the Seychelles and Maldives are scattered far from the rest of the world, larger islands with bigger populations, including Mauritius and Sri Lanka, mean more competition, so hotel prices can be lower.

Looking at the periphery of the Indian Ocean may also expand your options. Zanzibar in Tanzania and the Kenyan coast near Mombasa offer beautiful resorts at incredible prices – plus a safari option.

TIME IS MONEY

Destination picked, swot up on the weather to score a bargain. Diane Prendergast, Gold Medal's destination manager for the Middle East and Indian Ocean, says: "[UK] summer months tend to be the cheapest time to travel to the Indian Ocean, when agents see more value for money. This does, however, tend to be the wetter season. May or October are

ideal, as they are just entering and exiting the wetter season."

There's more good news: keen to fill empty rooms, many hotels throw in upgrades, better room categories, complimentary dining and even free activities during off-season.

FLYING LOW

Direct flights are desirable but can come with a higher price tag, so consider a connecting flight that lets clients stretch their legs or add a stopover on the way to beachy paradise.

The best fares and shortest journey times often come via Turkey or the Gulf, with several daily flights from the UK – including regional airports – to Dubai with Emirates, Abu Dhabi with Etihad Airways, Doha with Qatar Airways or Istanbul with Turkish Airlines, and onward connections across the Indian Ocean.

Low-cost carriers are even springing up with headline-grabbing fares – including a Wizz Air link from Abu Dhabi to Malé for as little as £65 one way, or flydubai's new Dubai-Mombasa route, due to start on January 12. However, it pays to read the fine

print, as advertised fares may have less-than-convenient connections or exclude check-in baggage.

ADD VALUE

Souped up all-inclusives are a fantastic place to find extra value. In many cases, your clients will need to spend barely any money once they arrive, allowing them to beat inflation. At Oblu Xperience Ailafushi in the Maldives, all guests stay under the Fushi Plan – which includes airport speedboat transfers, à la carte dining, unlimited standard drinks plus non-motorised watersports such as paddleboarding and kayaking – from £240 per night.

Longer stays may also come with discounts or upgrades. For those looking to stay 14 nights or more, Mercury Travel runs second-week-free deals (on a room-only basis), with plenty of add-on experiences such as mini-tours.

Commercial manager Harford advises: "Elevate the selling potential of our Indian Ocean holidays by showcasing not just a destination, but an immersive experience enriched with our excellent add-on options."

TOUR DE FORCE

Escorted tours might not be the first thing that comes to mind for an Indian Ocean escape, but they can be an immersive, budget-friendly way to see a lot in one trip.

Sri Lanka is a favourite for operators such as Newmarket Holidays, Cox & Kings, Titan Travel and Wendy Wu Tours, bringing together coast, culture, history and wildlife on group departures or reasonably priced private tours.

Travellers can also skim the waves on a small-group trip – ideal for solos keen to see the region without the romantic resorts – with affordable island-hopping escapes from the likes of Intrepid Travel in the Seychelles or G Adventures in the Maldives. On the latter, board a traditional dhoni to drift slowly through the atolls, stopping at Maldivian-inhabited islands, for £1,349 per person (excluding flights), with a guide who can offer know-how like the best sunrise spots or an authentic home-cooked meal.

With just a little thinking outside the box, a break in paradise doesn't need to cost the earth. **TW**