

# Under the sea

Indian Ocean getaways are about more than relaxing at the water's edge – guests want to explore and protect what is beneath the surface, finds **Isobel Turner**

**W**hen dreaming up an idyllic Indian Ocean scene, the first thing that comes to mind is the glistening water, which seamlessly blends turquoise, emerald and teal into a breathtaking shade of blue.

Overwater villas and beachfront hotels offer all-important ocean views, but with a growing focus on sustainability, visitors want to know more about what's going on beneath the surface.

As more travellers become conscious of the environment – Skyscanner's 2024 Travel Trends survey found 64% of travellers believe sustainable travel is important – these regenerative activities are soaring in popularity.

On Sri Lanka's south coast, more than half of guests at The Fortress Resort & Spa take part in turtle conservation, according to the resort's turtle ranger, Lucky Laksiri. He says: "Many enjoy participating in conservation activities because they want to feel they are making a difference. Guests can learn about the different species of turtles that nest on our beach, their life cycles and the threats they face."

In Mauritius, Altitude Hotels is also on a mission to connect guests with the ocean, having brought more than 20,000 visitors to its Marine Discovery Centre since it was established in 2010. "It aims to boost knowledge of the marine and coastal environment among the local community and hotel guests, and contributes to critical scientific research,"

explains scientific programme manager Nina Svensson Dubois.

So, when it comes to an Indian Ocean getaway, relaxing at a glamorous sun-soaked resort is only part of the picture – travellers are also helping to preserve the region's marine life and fragile ecosystems by picking properties that put conservation first.

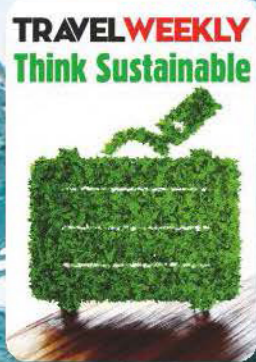
#### PATINA MALDIVES, THE MALDIVES

Flanked by golden beaches, this resort boasts 90 villas with beach and ocean views, plus 20 secluded studios set among tropical foliage.

Younger guests will love the Footprints kids' club and Fab Lab for four to 11-year-olds, where budding eco-warriors can turn recycled ocean plastic into models using 3D printing and laser-cutting technology. Guests of all ages can get creative at a free ceramics and coral conservation workshop led by the resort's marine biologist, who can explain how clay structures aid the restoration of local reefs.

Patina Maldives' sustainability initiatives aren't just for guests, either – the resort offers free Padi dive certifications to local children to encourage awareness of the ocean environment among the next generation.

**Book it:** Mercury Holidays offers seven nights' bed and breakfast from £2,195, including transfers and flights departing May 29, 2024. [mercuryholidays.co.uk](http://mercuryholidays.co.uk)



PICTURE: Jake Wilson

## DESTINATIONS

### MARINE CONSERVATION | INDIAN OCEAN



#### CLOCKWISE

FROM LEFT: Marine Discovery Centre, Paradise Cove Hotel; releasing baby turtles, The Fortress Resort & Spa; aerial view of Patina Maldives

PICTURE: Georg Roske



#### PARADISE COVE BOUTIQUE HOTEL, MAURITIUS

This adult-only beachfront retreat is nestled on the north Mauritius coast and, beneath the swaying palms, each of its 75 suites looks out across a sparkling cove.

To better understand the bay and how to protect it, guests can visit the Marine Discovery Centre at sister property Lagoon Attitude. As well as meeting marine biologists, a snorkelling trail gets up close and personal with turtles, rays and schools of tropical fish for an insight into the fragility of underwater life. There's also the opportunity to join regular beach cleans.

**Book it:** Kuoni offers seven nights' half-board from £2,699, including flights departing on January 13, 2024. [kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)

#### THE FORTRESS RESORT & SPA, SRI LANKA

Despite being styled after a nearby historic fort, it's the future that this chic resort is focused on – namely that of the turtles in its surrounding waters.

Not only can guests learn more about eco efforts at the on-site

turtle hatchery, but they can also get hands on with the endangered hatchlings as part of the Relax and Release Turtle Conservation project.

Aside from conservation, the Fortress has plenty to keep clients satisfied, including an indulgent spa and yoga pavilion.

**Book it:** Premier Holidays offers seven nights' B&B from £1,469, including transfers and flights, for departures in April 2024. [premierholidays.co.uk](http://premierholidays.co.uk)

#### THE RITZ-CARLTON MALDIVES, THE MALDIVES

This luxury island has sustainability at its roots. Before the 100 villas were built on the North Malé atoll, marine experts studied the site to minimise the impact on the coral reef.

Now, staff work in collaboration with oceanographic explorer and environmentalist Jean-Michel Cousteau, inviting guests to explore the Maldives' unique ecosystems through the Ambassadors of the Environment programme. It includes activities such as kayaking and snorkelling, all approved by the resident marine biologist.


**Book it:** Elegant Resorts offers seven nights' half-board from £6,915, including boat transfers, lounge passes and flights departing December 5. [elegantresorts.co.uk](http://elegantresorts.co.uk)

#### HILTON SEYCHELLES NORTHOLME RESORT & SPA, THE SEYCHELLES

Against a backdrop of lush tropical gardens, this resort's private villas face the Indian Ocean, offering panoramic views of the sea.

The diverse beauty of the reef is perfectly showcased on a 650-metre snorkelling trail created by the resort's Marine Conservation Society, where a rainbow of coral species forms a breathtaking tapestry.

Visit the on-site coral nursery to marvel at newly grown corals in their tanks before they're replanted, or embark on a guided snorkelling tour to see freshly planted corals.

**Book it:** If Only offers seven nights' bed and breakfast from £2,919, including private transfers and flights departing December 11. [ifonly.net](http://ifonly.net) 

### BEST OF THE rest

#### Amilla Maldives Resort & Residences, the Maldives

Watch migrating rays on a guided snorkelling tour or speak to the marine biologist to find out how Amilla collects data for the Maldivian Manta Ray Project.

#### Serena Beach Resort & Spa, Kenya

Framed by coconut palms and lush gardens, this resort showcases its sustainability efforts with a walk-on chessboard created from 2,512 recycled flip-flops collected from Kenya's beaches.

#### Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru, the Maldives

With the resort's Manta Watch programme, guests can accompany the full-time manta ray research team to snorkelling spots where rays and whale sharks congregate.

### ASK THE expert

#### Toby Buckridge, Seychelles specialist, Audley Travel

"For the Seychelles, you can't get a better appreciation of marine conservation in action than by visiting the outer islands. We recommend a stay on Alphonse Island, which offers the chance to experience a marine safari of a lifetime."

