

# What lies beneath

Marine conservation is a handy way to upsell as well as a pressing issue, writes Laura French

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Sustainability this, sustainability that. We all know it's important, but what does it actually mean for you? Well, when it comes to the ocean, it can be a strong selling point.

Marine conservation projects offer a way for guests to get involved and learn from hands-on experience - so you can hook in families eager for an educational break, while also appealing to eco-conscious types. Even those less keen on ecology might be swayed by the prospect of snorkelling trips and complimentary activities, giving clients the nudge needed to

seal the deal on a high-value booking.

And now is the right time to be highlighting such initiatives, with interest on the rise, according to

Dr Annemarie Kamer, marine biologist at

Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru. "There's definitely been an increase in awareness, thanks to a number of scientific studies that have shed light on the proven benefits of conservation projects," she says.

Those initiatives are especially prevalent in the Indian Ocean, and for good reason, with one

of the world's highest levels of marine biodiversity found there. So wise up to what's going on where with our rundown, then highlight your newfound knowledge to clients in search of a holiday with a difference.

## NEW PROJECTS

With its islands scattered across a blanket of turquoise, the Maldives is picture-perfect - but it might not always be. "Given that 80% lies one metre or less above sea water, it's the most at-risk country in south Asia," says Dr Kamer.

Fortunately, resorts are doing their bit to help, with a string of new research hubs, including Gili

Lankanfushi's marine biology centre Gili Veshi, which opened in June with a wet lab ready to host international researchers. Guests will be able to check out coral specimens through microscopes or get involved with activities - from diving to remove invasive starfish species, to planting carbon-sinking seagrass and heading out on family-friendly treasure hunts with a marine biology team. Activities start at £77, but there'll be a range of complimentary options too: think eco tours, reef cleaning, marine movies and more.

New resort Hurawalhi, in the Lhaviyana atoll, has a centre focused on coral reefs and



RIGHT:  
Hurawalhi

BELOW:  
Coral nursery,  
Baros Maldives



PICTURE: RAY VAN EEDEN/LIQUIDEXPLORER.COM

The most unusual option available is hopping onboard a dhoni and shadowing the Manta Trust team for a whole day. Passengers will learn how to look for mantas, while helping collect identification photos. The best part is it's included with the stay, which gives the resort a unique edge for wildlife-loving families on the hunt for a memorable trip.

► REEF RESTORATION

This biodiversity all relies on the health of the reef, of course. "It gives a habitat to thousands of species," says Caterina Fattori, marine biologist at Outrigger Konotta Maldives. "This marine life is important for the economy of the country and the whole Indian Ocean. It attracts tourists, and the fishing industry relies on it too.

"When El Niño occurred in April 2016, heating the temperature of the ocean, the reef was badly affected. Corals released algae, turning it white – known as bleaching," she adds.

Under Outrigger's Ozone coral restoration project, the team began monitoring water temperatures and their effect on the reef. Guests are now able to get involved with the project – attaching coral fragments to frames to create new colonies – and there's a twice-weekly marine talk (complimentary) or bio-snorkelling trips for those looking to put words into action (from \$45).

For an equally comprehensive reef regeneration project, look to Baros Maldives, where guests can sponsor a coral frame, take part in a coral gardening workshop and even name their own – worth suggesting for couples wanting to mark a special



➔ manta rays. Research is being led by a resident marine biologist from the Manta Trust, and guests are invited to get involved with educational dives, snorkelling excursions and talks from visiting experts. They'll even be able to assist with research, which includes everything from estimating the population size and structure of these elegant creatures to defining their migration patterns.

A week's B&B in a Villa Suite at Gili Lankanfushi costs from £4,739 with Inspiring Travel Company, for travel between October 16 and December 20.

The price includes Emirates flights from Heathrow and speedboat transfers. [inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk](http://inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk)

Gold Medal offers seven nights' B&B at the four-star Shinagawa Beach, Sri Lanka, from £1,149 between May 1 and June 30, 2018. The price includes Emirates flights from Gatwick and private transfers. [goldmedal.co.uk](http://goldmedal.co.uk)



Guests will help with estimating the population size of the elegant mantas and defining their migration patterns

Guests can look after injured turtles, sponsor and transplant their own coral frame or snorkel at parrot reef (\$60 for adults, \$30 for children), while certified divers can help marine biologists 'farm' coral and build a garden under the supervision of a dive master (from \$100).







PICTURE: FELIX HUG/EYESONASIA.NET

**LEFT:**  
Banyan Tree  
Seychelles

**RIGHT:**  
Heron Island  
Resort

**BELOW:**  
Atlantis  
Paradise  
Island



occasion. The resort is also home to an EcoDive centre that aims to limit damage to the reef, with snorkellers told where to go to prevent disruption, alongside weekly marine presentations.

**BEYOND THE MALDIVES**

It's not only the Maldives that's in need of protection, of course. In Mauritius, staff at the Shandrani Beachcomber Resort & Spa have been trained in protecting the waters around the resort, while a host of kids' club activities get little ones started on thinking about the environment.

Over in Sri Lanka, volunteers at the Kosgoda Sea Turtle and Conservation Project collect eggs and take them to a hatchery before releasing them into the ocean at night, to help the turtles avoid predators. Gold Medal recommends the boutique Shinagawa Beach Hotel next



**Banyan Tree Seychelles even has a dedicated 'turtle officer'**

door for being near the action.

Clients with a soft spot for turtles might also be swayed by the Banyan Tree Seychelles, which works with the country's Marine Conservation Society to help protect these elusive creatures, holding sessions for visitors to learn more about them.

There's even a dedicated 'turtle officer' on site to get kids and parents alike interested in these serene creatures.

And who wouldn't be, when you've got these adorable animals to admire? **TW**



Conservation around the world

**Gaya Island Resort, Borneo**

Turtle rescue, reef restoration and conservation through education are at the heart of this resort, set within a protected marine park. "Its marine centre was also the first turtle rescue centre in Malaysia," says David Carlaw, head of faraway product at Premier Holidays.

**Atlantis Paradise Island, The Bahamas**

The Atlantis Blue Project offers family educational experiences, with proceeds helping to fund field conservation. This year, there's even a 'Tour de Turtles' race to raise awareness, in partnership with the Sea Turtle Conservancy.

**Heron Island Resort, Australia**

Awarded advanced eco-certification by Ecotourism Australia, the resort offers a research station that visitors can tour, and a Junior Rangers programme for seven to 12-year-olds.

**Jade Mountain and Anse Chastanet, Saint Lucia**

These sister resorts have introduced a spearfishing course to help limit numbers of invasive lionfish, which disrupt the ecosystem. Anse Chastanet also puts on diving trips to see the vibrant spectacle of coral spawning (August 14-16).

**Jumby Bay, A Rosewood Hotel, Antigua**

Home to the region's longest-running hawksbill turtle preservation programme, this is a worthy recommendation for wildlife enthusiasts. Guests can request a wake-up call if the chance to see nesting turtles arises.

