

Upsell the Seychelles

Make these islands extra special with exclusive add-ons, writes Katie McGonagle

Any visit to the Seychelles is pretty special: stroll along those white-sand shores, take a hike through the islands' tropical interiors, or spend a week at one of its luxury resorts, and it would be impossible not to feel at least a little bit spoilt.

Yet there are ways to enhance the experience even further. As a popular destination for special occasions – think

honeymoons, renewal of vows, anniversaries or big birthdays – having a few added extras up your sleeve can elevate a stay from special to spectacular.

If they've got the budget to fly business class or upgrade to a no-expense-spared luxury villa, then it's easy enough. But even if that's not an option, there are other ways to make a Seychelles stay even more exclusive.

GETTING THERE

The first opportunity to upgrade comes before clients even reach the Indian Ocean: with no direct services, most fly via the Gulf, opening up access to some of the best-regarded premium cabins in the industry.

Emirates runs twice-daily flights from Dubai to the Seychelles, with eight first-class seats, 42 business-class and 90 premium seats on the A380s that serve the first leg of the route, from Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester or Birmingham.

That means entry

to airport lounges, chauffeur services, enhanced food and wine, plus in first class, access to the on-board shower spa and a private suite. Return fares start at £2,827 in business or £4,892 in first, compared with £742 in economy.

Ethihad's business-class customers also enjoy the benefit of chauffeur service to and from the airport, à la carte dining and snacks on board, plus amenity kits, lie-flat beds and, on the upper deck of its A380, a lobby-style area for guests to relax, with daily flights from Heathrow or Edinburgh, and five a week from Manchester.

Fellow Gulf carrier Qatar Airways is poised to resume flights to the Seychelles this year, having flown the route from 2004 until 2013. The twice-daily flights – which link up with services from Heathrow, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh – start on December 12. Business-class fares lead in at £3,206 from Edinburgh (£849 in economy), and provide passengers with premium dining, Giorgio →



FAR LEFT:
Al Mourjan
Business
Lounge

LEFT:
Constance
Lemuria

BELOW:
Banyan Tree,
Seychelles

→ Armani amenity kits, designer sleepsuits and access to the Al Mourjan Business Lounge at Hamad airport in Doha.

If travellers can't quite stretch their budget to an upgrade, Gold Medal product manager Joanne Lowery recommends turning the need for a connecting flight into a positive by booking a twin-centre stay, stopping over in either Dubai or Abu Dhabi.

Likewise, the need for a boat transfer on arrival in the Seychelles can put a dampener on an already lengthy journey, but staff at Beachcomber's Sainte Anne Island suggest a helicopter transfer. Not only will clients reach their hotel quicker, but they'll also enjoy a scenic flight over the inner islands on the way.

▶ ON ARRIVAL

It's practically a pre-requisite of any honeymoon stay that there is a bottle of bubbly and a few

goodies waiting for the happy couple on arrival, and these luxury hotels don't disappoint.

Constance Lemuria offers discounts for honeymooners – these vary depending on dates – but they'll also have a bottle of Swartland sparkling wine and a beach bag with a men's polo shirt and women's pareo to greet them, plus they can feast on tropical fruits and local delicacies each day, or sit back and enjoy a complimentary Lemuria signature bath ceremony. Simply Luxury by Travel 2 finds these extras make the property a popular choice for honeymooners.

The Four Seasons Resort Seychelles is another strong contender for loved-up couples, according to If Only, where guests can spoil themselves with champagne and a honeymoon cake on arrival, plus an hour-long couples' massage in the Hill Top Spa. There are also romantic bath



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rituals, private dinners on Petite Anse Beach, and a golf driving range with brilliant views to top up the romance factor.

▶ ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

When even the lead-in room categories outclass many a hotel's presidential suite, clients might wonder whether they really need to bother upgrading their accommodation in the Seychelles. Yet there are some properties where shelling out a bit more

results in a much improved stay.

Zoe Saunders, product manager for ITC Luxury Travel, is a fan of the hilltop villas at Constance Ephelia. "These are a lovely upgrade from other room categories," she says. "They come with their own infinity pools and in-villa dining. The Beach Villa at Denis Island is also a great recommendation – there's only one and it's the only villa that has a private pool. The main pool is currently closed, so this is perfect if clients prefer not to swim in the sea."

Over at Enchanted Island Resort, a relative newcomer having opened two years ago under the JA Resorts & Hotels umbrella, guests can choose from Private Pool and Enchanted Signature Villas or upgrade to the Owner's Signature Villa.

Travel 2 senior product manager Deborah Wadhams says: "I would recommend



➔ this resort for a special trip to the Seychelles. It's located in the heart of the marine national park and has 10 villas, each with their own private pool, outdoor living space, outdoor bath and direct access to the beaches."

If relaxation reigns supreme over square footage, Banyan Tree Seychelles has added Spa Sanctuary Villas that grant unlimited spa treatments for two either in-villa or at the spa. Guests enjoy a footbath ritual on arrival, then a personal consultation to help choose from massage therapies including the Thai-inspired Asian Blend, deep-tissue techniques of a Balinese option or more intensive sports and Swedish massages, best rounded off with new daily yoga classes on the beach. Spa Sanctuary Pool Villas start at £1,290 per night.

▶ GIVING YOU EXTRA

Upgrades don't end with flights and accommodation – if you really want to lift a stay beyond the basics, take advantage of the romantic add-ons available in-resort. At Fregate Island Private, couples can – quite literally – elevate the experience by dining in a treehouse atop one of the island's oldest and largest banyan trees. Or if they're less keen on heights, swap it for secluded beachfront dining, or have the chef cook for them in their villa.

ITC Luxury Travel also recommends the equally lofty dining options at Maia Luxury Resort & Spa and Constance

RIGHT:
Maia Luxury
Resort & Spa



Lemuria Resort to clients seeking something special. Staff can set up a private dinner at the highest point of each resort – on the helipad at the former, or the golf course for the latter – so guests enjoy good food accompanied by even better ocean views.

Though if couples find spur-of-the-moment experiences more romantic, direct them towards the ultimate honeymoon retreat of North Island, home to just 11 exclusive villas. Here, the complimentary in-room minibar is more like a fully-stocked pantry, so guests can have their own beachfront picnic or late-night feast as and when they want. Better yet, it comes complete with their favourite tipple or much loved comfort foods, as villa

attendants stock it according to their preferences (sent in advance, or on arrival), with jars of sweets or home-baked choc-chip cookies; or cheeses, pâtés, pickles and fresh bread for those with savoury cravings.

▶ AROUND THE ISLANDS

"I would advise holidaymakers to island-hop in the Seychelles, as it's really easy to do," says Gold Medal's Joanne Lowery. "Each island has its own charm, with different things to do such as visiting the Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve on Praslin to see the famous Coco de Mer tree, Anse Source d'Argent on La Digue, which is the most photographed beach in the Seychelles, and the historic capital Mahé, which is one of the smallest capitals in the world and home to Little Ben, built to mark the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897."

Look out, too, for the array of wildlife scattered across the Seychelles, which will really enhance a stay for any animal lover. Guests can spot turtles hatching on the beaches of the North Island, or snorkel with tropical fish and take a trip underwater in a semi-submersible, part of Travel 2's new full-day Reef Safari tour. Or if they want more than just a taste of the rich marine life, sign them up to a diving course – Dive Worldwide has a two-day entry level course (from £260) or a more advanced open water option (from £300).

Alternatively, skip the organised tours and charter a boat for the day, so couples can set out to find a secluded cove to themselves and see what really makes the Seychelles special. **TW**



ITC Luxury Travel offers a week all-inclusive in an Ocean Panoramic Villa at Maia Luxury Resort & Spa from £5,079, based on two sharing and including flights, a 60-minute massage and private transfers, for travel before October 31. itcluxurytravel.co.uk

Travel 2 can arrange a week in a King Guest Ocean View room at the five-star Enchanted Island Resort from £1,299 bed and breakfast, including flights from Heathrow and transfers, for travel between August 22 and October 31. travel2.com



LEFT: Scuba diving in the Seychelles