

# of the BEST

## NATURAL BEAUTY SPOTS

Laura French picks out some of the Indian Ocean's most enchanting sights

**E**merald-green rainforests, electric-blue lagoons, sugar-white sands, smoking volcanoes... the Indian Ocean is a treasure trove when it comes to natural beauty spots across its smorgasbord of islands.

From meandering through mountains to tea-tasting in the hills, snorkelling in marine reserves to swimming beneath waterfalls, there's plenty to be getting on with for those after a side of scenery with their suntan.

But where do you start when it comes to selling it? We've picked out some of the highlights to inspire you.



### 1 LE MORNE BRABANT, MAURITIUS

Few sights are quite so stirring as Le Morne Brabant, the forested hump of a mountain that rises up from a ring of aqua-blue on the southwestern tip of Mauritius. Once a refuge for runaway slaves, today the Unesco-listed site is a hotspot for hikers, with a four-mile trail that takes in 360-degree views over the surrounding island. For those less into their hiking, the beach offers white, flour-soft sand and tropical palms jutting out on a secluded peninsula, as well as some of the best kitesurfing in Mauritius.

**Book it:** Nearby resort Heritage Le Telfair, a 20-minute drive away, offers a hiking excursion to Le Morne for £60. Nightly rates at the hotel start at £93 per person. [heritageresorts.mu](http://heritageresorts.mu)

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Dean Bennick/Inlighten Photography



### 2

### BAA ATOLL, THE MALDIVES

If there's one place that knows how to wow with world-famous waters, it's the Maldives, and among its superlative scenic spots is the Baa Atoll. Manta rays, whale sharks, dolphins, turtles and 1,200 species of fish inhabit the waters of this Unesco Biosphere Reserve, where nine inhabited islands sit in circles of cobalt. At the centre is Hanifaru Bay, a feeding ground for whale sharks and mantas that offers exceptional snorkelling. Amilla Fushi makes an excellent base, and offers its the Blue Hole, a huge cavity in the reef that's gained traction among divers the world over.

**Book it:** Carrier offers a seven-night holiday in a Treetop Pool Villa with free upgrade to half board, British Airways Club World flights from Heathrow to Malé, and shared seaplane transfers, for a December 4 departure. [carrier.co.uk](http://carrier.co.uk)

### 3

### VALLEE DE MAI, THE SEYCHELLES

Home to the infamous coco de mer palm tree, which bears the biggest seeds in the world, this sprawling, primeval rainforest on Praslin Island is as quintessentially tropical as you can get. Rare species such as the black parrot, Seychelles warbler and blue pigeon nestle among exotic flora, while giant bronze geckos and other unusual reptiles seek shade beneath the emerald canopy. It's so humid it feels like standing in a greenhouse, but for those who don't mind breaking a sweat, there are several hikes to take along flat, sandy trails that meander through the trees.

**Book it:** Caribtours offers a week at Raffles Seychelles, Praslin Island, from £3,039 per person, based on two sharing a Garden View Pool Villa (half-board) with flights and private transfers. [caribtours.co.uk](http://caribtours.co.uk)

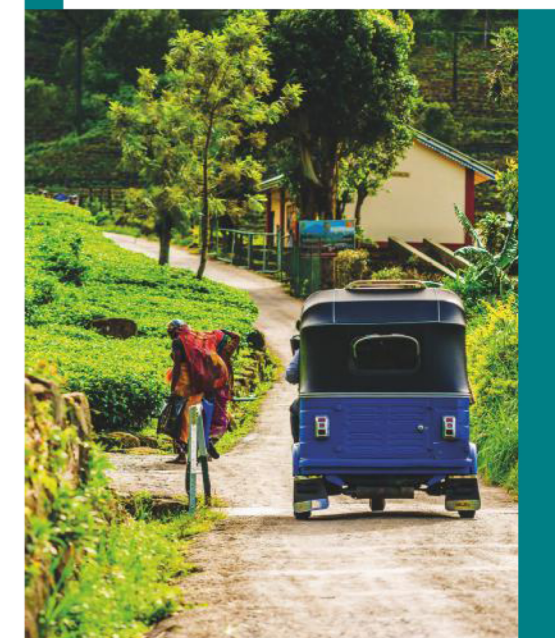


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### HAPUTALE, SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has head-turning beauty spots in abundance, but not all its features get as much attention as the likes of Yala National Park or Kandy. Among those lesser-known spots is Haputale, a small town on the southern tip of the Hill Country that's set on a jade-coloured mountain ridge amid swathes of tea plantations. Alongside the country's second-highest waterfall cascading onto the rocks below, you'll find idyllic walking trails, viewpoints with a perfect vantage point at sunrise, and a monastery peeping out from the jungle, with mystical, cloud-capped forest all around. It's worth noting Sri Lanka has just introduced strict entry requirements to limit the spread of coronavirus, which prohibit British citizens from entering the country, so be sure to check Foreign Office guidance before booking travel.

**Book it:** Travel 2 offers an 11-day Beautiful Sri Lanka tour combining the mainstream sites with Haputale and other quieter spots, which leads in at £3,439 per person, including accommodation in boutique lodges and campsites, and flights from Heathrow. [travel2.com](http://travel2.com)



## DESTINATIONS

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PICTURES: Arno Drexler; Shutterstock

### DENIS ISLAND, THE SEYCHELLES

Turtles laying eggs on the shoreline, exotic birds flying overhead and no-filter-needed beaches to accompany it all – there's a reason this private island has gained a worldwide rep, and it's not only for the views. Conservation is the top priority here, with a protected lagoon teeming with marine life and a whole array of restoration projects on hand, while 375 acres of private beach and forest promise plenty of areas to get lost in.

**Book it:** If Only offers an eight-night trip combining a four-night, full-board stay on Denis Private Island with four nights at Carana Beach Hotel on Mahé (B&B) from £2,659, including flights, transfers and a starlit dinner at the latter.

[ifonly.net](http://ifonly.net)

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### PITON DE LA FOURNAISE, REUNION ISLAND

For clients in search of something a little different, suggest Reunion Island, where the wealth of natural stunners includes Piton de la Fournaise, a dramatic, highly active volcano that erupts an average of once every nine months. Dating back around 500,000 years, it combines marble-like rock faces and jagged craters with fertile forest – an educational trail in the Enclos Fouqué caldera takes visitors to see the best of its moon-like landscapes.

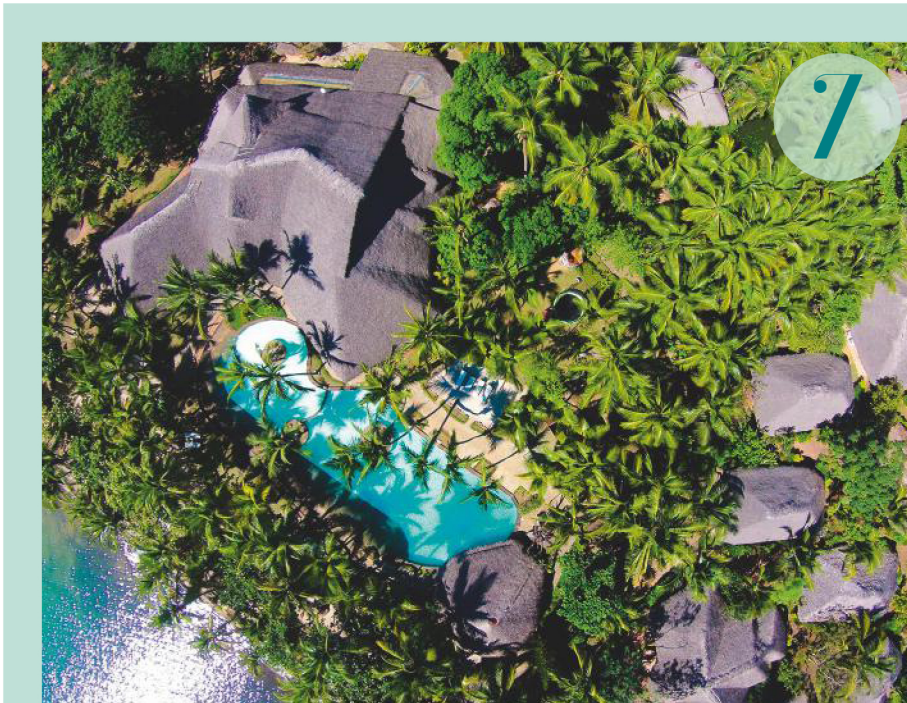
**Book it:** Hayes & Jarvis offers a seven-night holiday to Reunion Island from £1,599 per person, including seven nights at the five-star Lux Saint Gilles on a bed-and-breakfast basis and flights.

[hayesandjarvis.co.uk](http://hayesandjarvis.co.uk)



# DESTINATIONS

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### NOSY BE, MADAGASCAR

Remarkable flora and fauna are pretty much Madagascar's *raison d'être*, and you'll see them everywhere, from the aptly named Avenue of the Baobabs – where silhouettes of these oddly shaped trees line a dusty dirt track – to its plethora of rainforests. But for a spot that still feels like something of a secret, suggest Nosy Be, says John Parker, product manager for Madagascar at Premier Holidays. "This small island just off the mainland has glorious beaches, warm seas and world-class dive sites," he says. "But it still remains low-key and relatively undiscovered to tourists." Suggest Ravintsara Wellness Hotel on the west coast for a peaceful, secluded base with only 20 bungalows.

**Book it:** A week at Ravintsara Wellness Hotel costs from £1,599, including flights and private transfers in October.  
[trade.premierholidays.co.uk](http://trade.premierholidays.co.uk)

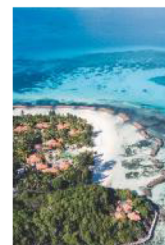
### BEST OF THE REST

**Bazaruto National Park, Mozambique:** For clients wanting to get off the tourist trail, suggest Mozambique's Bazaruto archipelago, a protected marine reserve with beauty spots such as and Beyond Bengueria Island, whose deserted, ultramarine lagoon offers exceptional snorkelling and swimming.



PICTURE: Dook Photography

**Sainte Anne, the Seychelles:** Club Med will be opening an eco-resort on this private island – set a 15-minute speedboat ride from Mahé – later in the year, bringing its lush hills and turquoise waters to families seeking a slice of exclusivity.



**Ile des deux Cocos, Mauritius:** Off the southeast coast of Mauritius in Blue Bay Marine Park, this secluded island is paradise personified, home to white-sand beaches, towering palms and an opulent, Moorish-style villa built by British governor Sir Henry Hesketh Bell and once used for extravagant parties. Day trips are available from all Lux resorts with a barbecue on the beach and optional overnight stays.



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### LONUBO, THE MALDIVES

Robinson Crusoe-style experiences might sound like a cliché, but it's arguably the only way to describe this far-flung, uninhabited isle, set on a lagoon so blue it looks like it's been through a Photoshop filter, and accessible by boat from sister island Maafushivaru. Snorkelling, swimming and sunbathing are all equally acceptable on its sugar-white shores, while couples wanting to push the boat out can arrange a candlelit dinner or overnight stay in a beach villa. Only one couple can visit at a time, meaning no battling for sunbeds, and no fighting over the views.

**Book it:** Kuoni offers seven nights' half-board at Maafushivaru in a Beach Villa, including Emirates flights from Gatwick and transfers. Departures in September and October cost from £2,299.  
[kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)

