

Take the plunge



Sell the best dive holidays in the Indian Ocean with **Laura French's** round-up of the top spots

1 here's something magical about descending deep into the ocean, discovering a world far from the daily hubbub and finding yourself at one with the creatures that call its waters home.

And few places are quite so ripe for discovery as the Indian Ocean, where whale sharks, manta rays, hammerheads, turtles and a whole host of exotic fish dart through some of the clearest waters on the planet.

So where exactly should you suggest for those wanting to sample its diving highlights? We've put together a guide to some of the best resorts and itineraries across the region, so next time a client has a diving enquiry, you know where to suggest, what to sell and how to cater for divers of every level.

BEST FOR...BEGINNERS

Sell: Constance Moofushi, Maldives

Why: The South Ari Atoll has gained worldwide fame for its diving credentials, and clients don't have to be pro divers to enjoy them. Constance Moofushi offers Padi courses to suit every level, as well as a complimentary 'introduction to scuba diving' lesson in

the swimming pool for those new to the sport. "There are plenty of scenic routes for beginners as well as for experienced divers," says Jessica Harris, If Only product manager for the Indian Ocean and Arabia. "There are a whopping 32 dive sites nearby, many occupied by whale sharks, dolphins and sea eagles, and the resort boasts a marvellous house reef as well as being on the manta ray migration route."

Book it: If Only offers 10 nights' all-inclusive in a Beach Villa from £4,479 per person, including flights with Emirates and seaplane transfers. ifonly.net

BEST FOR...COUPLES

Sell: Coco Bodu Hithi, Maldives

Why: Whitetip sharks, hawksbill turtles, dogtooth tuna and bluestripe snappers are among the exotic creatures to be spotted at this luxury, couple-friendly retreat, with a Padi centre taking divers of all levels out to explore the cerulean waters. Those less keen on going too deep can opt for a 'snorkelling with manta rays' excursion or sample the award-winning ➤

DESTINATIONS

INDIAN OCEAN | DIVING



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Constance Moofushi, the Maldives; Four Seasons Resort Seychelles at Desroches Island; a turtle at Biyadhoo, the Maldives; Coco Bodu Hithi, the Maldives



spa, while sunset cruises, fishing trips and canoeing add extra alone time. There's also a big emphasis on marine conservation, with marine biologists offering guided reef tours, and a coral nursery project that guests can sponsor.

Book it: Caribtours offers a week's half-board from £1,799 per person, based on two sharing an Island Villa and including flights on September 22. caribtours.co.uk

BEST FOR...ADVENTURERS

Sell: Liveaboard diving in the Seychelles

Why: For those wanting to immerse themselves in a dedicated diving holiday, a liveaboard is an excellent option, taking guests out to explore remote spots on a traditional schooner or yacht. Dive Worldwide offers a seven-night liveaboard trip in the Seychelles combining daily dives with kayaking, paddleboarding, snorkelling and other watersports, alongside island visits and land-based explorations to see deserted beaches, lush nature reserves and the famous Coco de Mer. The exact itinerary depends on conditions, but guests can expect eight dives with vibrant coral gardens and deep granite swim-throughs on the agenda, plus an experienced Padi instructor on board throughout.

Book it: The seven-night itinerary including flights, eight dives, all meals, island visits and other activities starts at £2,475 per person, based on two sharing. Boats carry up to 16 passengers. diveworldwide.com



PHIL NORTH brand manager, Dive Worldwide and Regaldiv

"The Indian Ocean is a superb choice for divers and marine life enthusiasts, offering a wide range of world-class experiences.

"The Maldives is hugely popular for our clients, with resorts catering for all levels. We also offer liveaboard options that tend to suit divers with a little experience. An Advanced Open Water qualification is not essential for this, but it does allow divers to get the best out of the liveaboard experience.

"The Seychelles also offers a range of experiences that are ideally suited to beginners or diving and non-diving couples, while adventurous souls may wish to venture south to Madagascar to experience excellent diving together with incredible wildlife experiences."

BEST FOR...SEASONED DIVERS

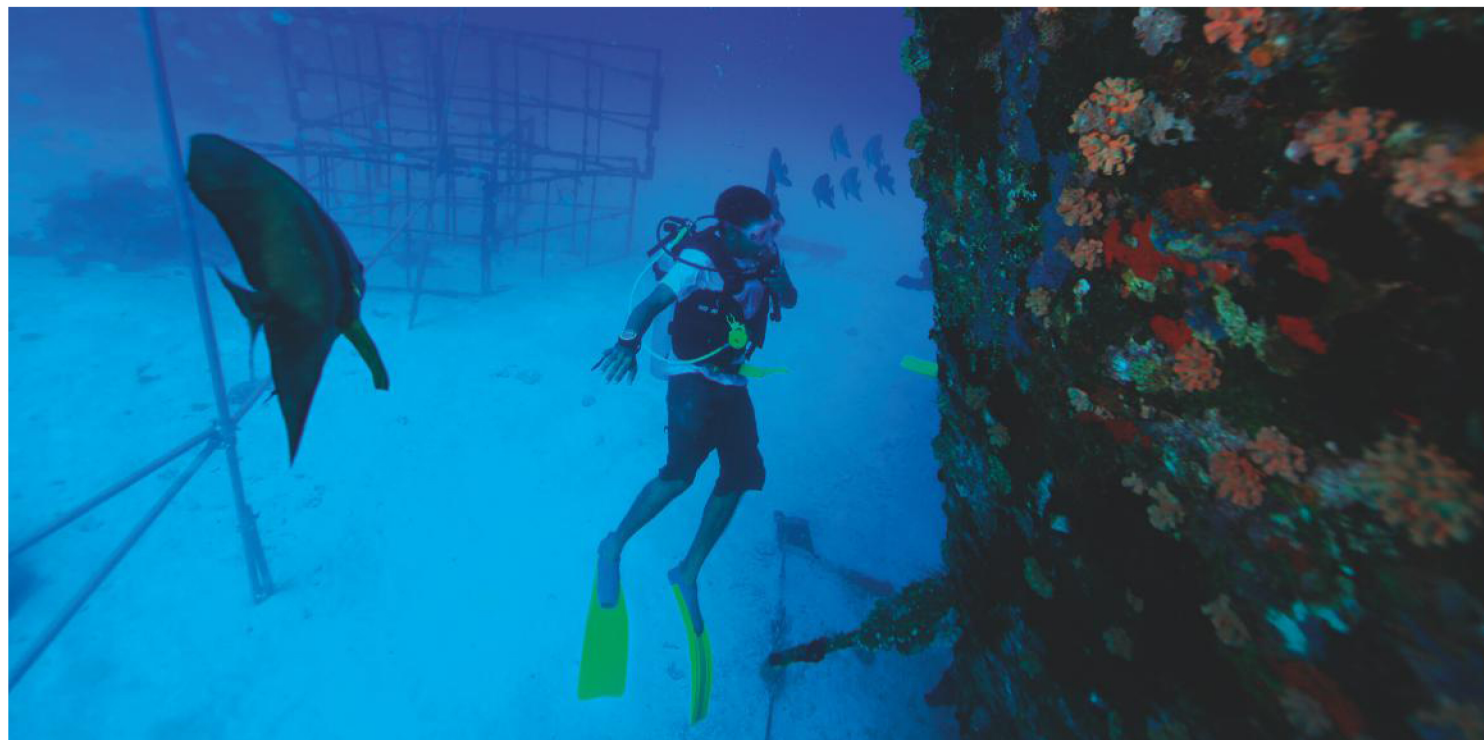
Sell: Dive and Detox in the Maldives

Why: A liveaboard isn't the only option for a dive-intensive holiday. For hardcore enthusiasts wanting to base themselves on land, suggest Regaldiv's new seven-night, small-group itinerary, which takes guests out on daily excursions from a base at the six-room Boutique Beach Resort on Dhigurah Island, in the South Ari Atoll. Guests will embark on up to 17 dives, including a full-day whale shark safari, a full-day manta safari and a night dive, with visits to rarely seen underwater spots. They'll also have plenty of opportunity to get to know this authentic, inhabited (and alcohol-free) Maldivian island that's firmly off the beaten track.

Book it: The seven-night trip costs from £1,675 per person, including full-board accommodation, domestic transfers from Malé and all dives (international flights excluded). regal-diving.co.uk ➤

DESTINATIONS

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PICTURE: Shutterstock

ABOVE: Diving at Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru in the Maldives

BEST FOR...LUXURY

Sell: Four Seasons Resort Seychelles at Desroches Island
Why: For a secluded escape with exceptional diving, Carrier recommends this private island resort in the Seychelles, 140 miles from main island Mahé and a 30-minute flight from the airport. "With four atolls located within the Outer Islands, Desroches has always been a favourite destination for diving," says Jenny Basham, Carrier product manager for the Indian Ocean. "There are more than a dozen dive sites nearby, with some legendary spots including the Desroches Drop and Circus Cave." Local dive operator Blue Safari is on hand to take guests on excursions to explore the best of them – from wall dives and tunnels to deep caves and swim-throughs – with courses ranging from introductory sessions to eco-diving.
Book it: Carrier offers a week from £4,865 based on two sharing an Ocean-View Pool Villa, including international and domestic flights, departing October 21. carrier.co.uk

BEST FOR...FAMILIES

Sell: La Pirogue, Mauritius
Why: For an action-packed stay that combines diving with other activities, suggest this family-friendly spot on the west coast of Mauritius. Its Padi centre offers diving courses and excursions for novices through to advanced divers, while windsurfing, snorkelling, kayaking, sailing and trips in glass-bottom boats will keep any non-diving members of the clan busy. Accommodation is in traditional Mauritian-style thatched cottages set among coconut groves, with a resident band, six restaurants and bars, plus a kids' club and teens' club on hand to keep younger ones entertained.
Book it: Gold Medal offers seven nights' all-inclusive from £2,079, including flights from Gatwick on November 9 and based on two sharing a Garden Bungalow. goldmedal.co.uk

BEST FOR...BUDGET TRAVELLERS

Sell: Biyadhoo, Maldives
Why: Diving holidays don't have to mean blowing the budget. For an excellent-value Maldivian resort that puts the focus on laid-back simplicity, Kuoni points to Biyadhoo, which offers diving for every level from its on-site Padi school, with a number of top sites close by and a colourful house reef offering standout snorkelling (guests get two snorkelling trips included per week). Rooms are set right by the water's edge and there's a set-menu restaurant and alfresco bar where guests gather at nightfall after an active day.
Book it: A week's full-board costs from £1,479 based on two sharing a Standard Room on selected dates in September and including flights from Gatwick. Guests staying between May and November get a free upgrade to all-inclusive. kuoni.co.uk

BEST FOR...ECO ENTHUSIASTS

Sell: Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, Maldives
Why: Direct eco-conscious divers to Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, set in the North Malé Atoll, where hammerhead sharks, hawksbill turtles, eagle rays and shipwrecks count among the treasures. The property offers courses for all levels from its Padi centre. Guests can embark on overnight catamaran cruises to explore the diving highlights of the North and South Malé Atolls, or venture off on a Full Moon Night Snorkel in the company of the resort's resident Marine Lab team. Other marine activities include coral planting and reef cleaning, while an award-winning spa, two beachfront restaurants and waterfront bar cater for those who'd rather sit back and take it easy, cocktail in hand.
Book it: An Ocean View Pool Villa starts at £410 per night, based on two people sharing on a B&B basis. banyantree.com **TW**

