



The real deal

Laura French looks at how to do the Indian Ocean on a budget

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Turquoise seas, white sands, fiery sunsets... For many the Indian Ocean is the stuff of dreams, reserved for once-in-a-lifetime occasions that blow the budget in one fell swoop.

But to limit this diverse region to ultra-luxe bookings is to cut out a significant chunk of its potential market.

Increasing airlift, off-season bargains, lesser-known destinations and a raft of good-value resorts are making this region more accessible than ever, and if you plan it right, you might just make your client's dream trip happen - all without requiring them to remortgage the house.

We've put together a guide on how to bag the best savings,

with expert tips and resort recommendations from those in the know.

▶ THE MALDIVES

Timing is everything in life, and travel is no exception. For the best deals in the Maldives, Sheena Paton, senior product and purchasing manager for Kuoni, recommends travelling between May and November, when upgrades are common, beaches are quiet and the weather is less disruptive than clients might envisage. "While low season visitors can experience wetter weather, this is largely in the form of sporadic showers that come and go rather than whole days of rain," she says.

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For some of the best-value accommodation in the region she recommends the four-star Kuramathi, where prices start at £1,449 per person in May and June 2019 for a week's full-board (including SriLankan Airlines flights from Heathrow). Facilities are expansive with 13 restaurants and bars, two oceanfront infinity

pools, a lagoon beneath the palm trees and a house reef offering snorkelling straight off the shore, and clients travelling in these months also get a complimentary room upgrade from a Beach Villa to a Beach Villa with Jacuzzi, adding further value.

For those wanting to get active and do more than just eat, drink and be merry, it's worth looking to the all-inclusives. Caribtours recommends Ozen by Atmosphere in Maadhoo Island for one of the most comprehensive packages. Rates might not be quite as low as some of the other options, but two free excursions per stay, a twice-daily minibar refill, premium drinks and a dine-

4 TOP TIPS

Mark Godfrey, commercial director at Premier Holidays:

Fly indirect

Consider flying indirect: there are often savings to be had by flying via the Middle East or Sri Lanka

Go all-inclusive

For those on a budget, going all-inclusive in Mauritius and the Maldives is the best option. It's a great way to budget for your whole holiday in advance

Stay on

The discounts or free nights offered by hotels are often greater for long durations, so consider a longer stay

Book early

Some hotels offer up to 30% discounts for early bookers, and booking newly-opened hotels can also help secure a bargain



LEFT: Coco De Mer, Praslin Island, Seychelles

RIGHT: Black Parrot Suites, Praslin Island, Seychelles

BELOW: Earth villas, Ozen by Atmosphere, the Maldives



➔ around programme might just sway clients wanting to get the best bang for their buck. A week's all-inclusive costs from £3,645 per adult sharing an Earth Villa, including flights, boat transfers and two free spa treatments (valid until December 23, and from April 29 to October 31, 2019).

Look for resorts that offer affordable transfers to make further savings.

"Some offer free domestic transfers or speedboat transfers, which tend to be cheaper than seaplane transfers," says Jenny Basham, product manager for Carrier. Four Seasons offers free seaplane transfers between its Kuda Huraa and Landaa Giraavaru resorts for clients staying three nights or more at each - worth suggesting to those who want to experience a seaplane without having to fork out extra cash.

▶ SEYCHELLES

Seychelles might be one of the more expensive options, but head here in low season (European summer) and you'll find some decent savings - alongside some of the best weather



Head to Seychelles in low season and you'll find decent savings - and some of the best weather in the Indian Ocean

in the Indian Ocean. "The rainfall is actually at its lowest during the UK summer months, making it a great time to go here," says Jenny Peart, Caribtours' head of product.

She recommends The H Resort on Mahé for an excellent-value, five-star boutique option in the heart of the action. Twin it with the Hilton Labriz on the cut-off, peaceful Silhouette Island and you have a relatively affordable, multi-centre holiday that takes in two very different sides to this 115-island archipelago. Ten nights at The H Resort and five nights at Hilton Seychelles Labriz, with breakfast, flights, transfers

and UK airport lounge leads in at £2,719.

For clients on even more of a budget, Premier Holidays recommends Coco de Mer and Black Parrot Suites on Praslin Island. "It's a small hotel that often offers complimentary nights and a reasonably-priced half-board option," says Mark Godfrey, commercial director. Prices start from £1,785 per person B&B, including flights from Heathrow via Abu Dhabi and Mahé, with an early booking discount.

▶ MAURITIUS

But for some of the best savings look to Mauritius. "Most resorts offer complimentary water sports, including waterskiing, no matter the meal plan you are booked on," says Caribtours' Jenny Peart. "That makes it a great option for those wanting activities."

For a luxury, family-friendly option offering decent savings, Carrier recommends Shangri-La's Le Touessrok Resort & Spa, where discounts of up to 19% are available until May 2019. Tucked away on the quiet Trou d'Eau Douce Bay, it's



RIGHT:
Veranda
Paul &
Virginie,
Mauritius

FAR RIGHT:
Centara
Ceysands
Resort & Spa,
Sri Lanka

BELOW:
Shangri-La
Le Touessrok
Resort & Spa,
Mauritius



PICTURE: VIRGINIE TENNANT; LACOSTE; MIRELLA CONTOLI

all about the privacy here, with pristine beaches backing onto a stretch of sparkling turquoise sea and a string of activities, from golf at the nearby 18-hole championship course to Zumba, yoga, water-skiing, snorkelling and plenty more. A week starts from £2,899 per person departing December 10 with Carrier, including British Airways flights from Gatwick.

For an equally active, cheaper option without the kids, suggest the adult-only Tui Sensimar Lagoon Mauritius. Set on the white-sand Anse La Raie lagoon, it offers activities such as diving, windsurfing, kayaking and kitesurfing, with affordable rates and a wide choice of dining. Prices start from £1,232 per person for a week's all-inclusive, with flights from Gatwick on December 20.

Just as well priced is the four-star, adult-only Veranda Paul & Virginie. The couple-centric,

peaceful boutique offers the likes of catamaran cruises, fishing excursions, spa treatments and bike trips (some for an extra fee), with all-inclusive prices from £1,379 per person for seven nights in May 2019 with Premier Holidays, including flights from Gatwick via Istanbul.

► SRI LANKA

Demand for Sri Lanka might be growing by the day, but it still offers excellent value. "It typically offers the lowest prices [of all the Indian Ocean regions] during low season," says Melanie Burton, Travel 2 assistant product manager for the Middle East and Indian Ocean.

She suggests the four-star Club Hotel Dolphin in Waikkal for a budget-friendly all-inclusive, where activities span kayaking, mini-golf and tennis, plus spa treatments, live music, karaoke and other entertainment for all the brood to enjoy. From £899



G Adventures takes up to 16 guests around the palm-fringed islands that lace these blue waters

per person for a week's all-inclusive with Travel 2, including Gulf Air flights from Heathrow. Valid for travel between May 6 and June 17, 2019.

Even the higher-end resorts have a relatively affordable price tag here. Take Centara Ceysands Resort & Spa, where prices start at £219 per room per night half-board, with a 'stay three nights, pay for two' offer available, or Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort, where beach access rooms are from £208 (B&B). Affordable luxury, tick.

► ISLAND-HOPPING

For clients wanting to see as much as they can in a short space of time, suggest a cruise or sailing trip. Fred Olsen combines the highlights of the Seychelles and Sri Lanka with some of Thailand's most spectacular islands in a 14-night Seychelles, Maldives & Andaman Islands cruise. Priced from £2,999 per person for an Interior room, departing November 14, 2019, and based on two sharing with all meals, afternoon tea, entertainment, flights and Captain's gala dinner.

G Adventures has just launched a Maldives Island Hopping sailing trip, taking up to 16 guests around the palm-fringed islands that lace these blue waters with immersive, Maldivian experiences – think surfing, tea tasting, fishing and more, as well as an authentic dining experience with a local family, with prices from £649 for eight days. Now that's a deal. **TV**

FAST FACT

New brand Salt has opened its first property in Mauritius (B&B from \$200)