

INDIAN OCEAN



ALAMY; GETTY IMAGES; SAKIS PAPADOPOULOS; 4 CORNERS

RETREAT FROM THE WORLD
Bandos Island, above; the rock fortress of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka, below

Paradise awaits! Here are 20 places to find it

refurbishment. There's a stunning new pool (one of three), a new activity hub, Club One, and a splendidly devised water sports pavilion, and all the rooms have been redesigned. The resort is stunningly set on a peninsula on the north-east coast.
◆ Bailey Robinson (01488 689700; baileyrobinson.com), £3,325 including half board for a trip in early Jan.

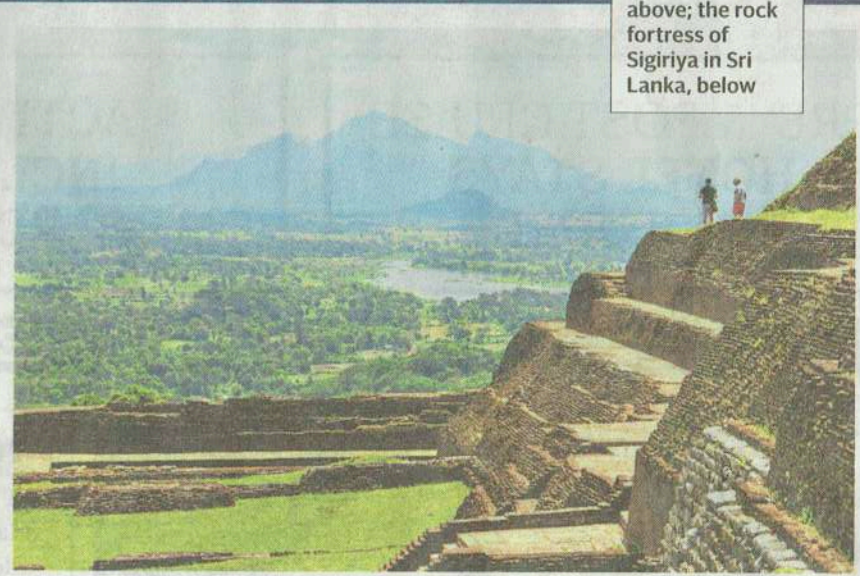
COUPLES

9 KOMANDOO ISLAND RESORT & SPA, MALDIVES

This adults-only resort, about 40 minutes by seaplane from Male, attracts many return visitors with

offers a host of activities, from stand-up paddle boarding to kayaking, but it's the house reef that makes a stay here truly special; the coral is some of

Belle Mare Plage (telegraph.co.uk/ttconstancebellemareplage) recently introduced a range of new activities for children in addition to its



WINTER SUN

From the Maldives

to Mauritius, these islands offer idyllic escapes for all tastes, says **Harriet O'Brien**

The Indian Ocean: nowhere else on Earth will you find a perfect winter climate combined with such a winning variety of island destinations, resorts and idyllic palm-shaded beaches. If you are looking for an exotic holiday, you just have to choose between the atolls of the Maldives, the rich culture of Sri Lanka and the exotic landscapes of Mauritius, and you will find a holiday to suit. To help, here is our selection of 20 of the best holidays on offer this winter – whether you are looking for a bargain, luxury, or an active break, travelling as a family or a couple.

GREAT VALUE

1 RIU CREOLE, MAURITIUS

Among the upscale all-inclusive hotels on Mauritius, Riu Creole (riu.com) stands out for its spa, its proximity to an 18-hole golf course and its beachside setting at the foot of Le Morne Brabant. ♦ TUI (0871 230 2555; tui.co.uk), from £1,368 for a January departure.

2 BANDOS ISLAND RESORT AND SPA, MALDIVES

There's a good feeling of space at Bandos (bandosmaldives.com), which is on one of the Maldives' larger islands, about a 10-minute boat ride from Male. This lively resort is acclaimed for its three restaurants and its coral reef and dive centre. ♦ British Airways Holidays (0344 493 0778; ba.com/maldives), £1,259 including breakfast, book by Nov 15. BA (ba.com) flies direct to the Maldives from Gatwick three times a week between Nov and March.

3 AVANI KALUTARA RESORT, SRI LANKA

Built in elegant colonial style, handsome Avani Kalutara (minorhotels.com) is set by a lagoon on Sri Lanka's west coast. From yoga sessions to spa access and water sports (available at sister property Anantara Kalutara; telegraph.co.uk/tt-anantarakalutara), there's plenty to keep you



occupied, although should you fancy exploring – the historic sights of Galle are about an hour-and-a-half's drive south. ♦ Trailfinders (020 7369 1200; trailfinders.com), £899 half board.

4 HERITANCE KANDALAMA, SRI LANKA

Kandalama (heritancehotels.com) is a complete treat. It was devised as an eco-hotel in the Nineties by the architect Geoffrey Bawa, who wanted it to become part of its jungly hill landscape. It has open corridors that let in wildlife, from birds to monkeys. The 152 stylish bedrooms look out to the Dambulla temples and Sigiriya Rock fortress. It is a beautiful base for exploring the island's cultural riches. ♦ Travel Republic (020 8974 7200; travelrepublic.co.uk), £902 including breakfast.

SHEER LUXURY

5 MILAIDHOO, MALDIVES

Spectacularly luxurious Milaidhoo (milaidhoo.com) is in the vibrantly coral-rich Baa Atoll – so special it is

Unesco protected. Beautifully devised with handcrafted fittings such as doors that fold away so that you walk into your idyllic view, Milaidhoo has a state-of-the-art spa, three restaurants and 50 very private villas, each with a fabulous infinity pool.

♦ Red Savannah (01242 787 800; redsavannah.com), £5,125 half board.

6 NIYAMA, MALDIVES

Butler service, open-air bathrooms and almost every hi-tech accoutrement imaginable come as standard in the 134 villas at Niyama (niyama.com) in Dhaalu Atoll (the resort has its own private lounge for seaplane transfers from Male airport). Luxury is innovative and fun here. You can dine underwater in Subsix restaurant/nightclub or in the treetops at Nest bistro.

♦ Exsus Travel (020 7563 1303; exsus.com), from £2,970 with breakfast (price includes a 40 per cent discount).

WATER WAYS

Milaidhoo, top; Komandoo's water villas, right; picking tea in Sri Lanka, below

7 CAPE WELIGAMA, SRI LANKA

Cape Weligama (telegraph.co.uk/tt-capeweligama) has been a game-changer in the Sri Lankan hotel world, its superb service and attention to detail setting it several rungs above most other top accommodation on the island. Literally so: styled as a Sinhalese village, it stands high on a cliff top on the south coast – the views are jaw-dropping, particularly from the infinity pool. Great food, a serene spa and 39 elegant suites and villas complete the sybaritic scene here. ♦ Cox & Kings (020 3642 0861; coxandkings.co.uk), £2,575 including breakfast.

8 ONE&ONLY LE SAINT GERAN, MAURITIUS

One&Only Le Saint Geran (telegraph.co.uk/tt-lesaintgeran) is set to raise the bar of luxury on Mauritius when it relaunches in December after a 10-month

good reason. Discreet, intimate and low-key, Komandoo (komandoo.com) has 65 villas, a vibrant coral reef and two restaurants – buffet-style Falhu and Aqua, which rests on stilts over the Komandoo lagoon.

♦ Kuoni (01306 747008; kuoni.co.uk), £2,698, full board, book by Nov 30.

10 GILI LANKANFUSHI, MALDIVES

One of the Maldives' most exceptional barefoot-luxury havens, Gili Lankanfushi (gili-lankanfushi.com) offers fabulous dining, a serene spa, a jungle cinema, water sports and more. Yet you might not want to set foot beyond your accommodation; the 45 rustic-chic overwater villas are secluded, large and lovely.

♦ Elegant Resorts (01244 897516; elegantresorts.co.uk), £4,495 including breakfast.

11 BEACHCOMBER DINAROBIN, MAURITIUS

From an 18-hole golf course and a large spa to a choice of five swimming pools and four restaurants, Beachcomber Dinarobin (telegraph.co.uk/ttbeachcomberdinarobin) presents an ideal combination of activity and pampering. Fringed by a long white beach on the south-west coast, this is a generously large resort with plenty of peaceful spaces. ♦ Beachcomber Tours (01483 445685; beachcombertours.co.uk), £2,510 half board in a junior suite, for a Dec 11 departure.

12 SUGAR BEACH RESORT AND SPA, MAURITIUS

At this plantation-style resort right on the sandy bay at Flic-en-Flac, there's plenty of scope for couples to find romantic seclusion. Facilities at Sugar Beach Resort (sugarbeach.com) include a spa complete with hammam, six tennis courts and three restaurants. ♦ Destinology (01204 821396; destinology.co.uk), £1,629 half board, for travel until Dec 21.

13 UGA ESCAPES, SRI LANKA

Suffused with intimate charm, the five properties of the Uga Escapes boutique hotel group are beautifully located and devised to give an innate sense of adventure and elegant Sri Lankan character. ♦ Sri Lanka in Style (00 94 11 239 6666; srilankainstyle.com), offers a two-centre break at Uga Escapes' Chena Huts (telegraph.co.uk/tt-chenahuts) by the sea at Yala, and Ulagalla south of Anuradhapura; this costs £2,337, including breakfast at Ulagalla and all-inclusive board at Chena Huts.

FAMILIES

14 OBLU BY ATMOSPHERE AT HELENGELI, MALDIVES

There's a lively vibe at this stylish resort about a 50-minute speedboat ride from the airport near Male. Oblu by Atmosphere (oblu-helengeli.com)

well-established kids' club for under

◆ Hayes & Jarvis (01293 762456; hayesandjarvis.co.uk), from £8,599 all-inclusive.

15 THE FORTRESS, SRI LANKA

Set on golden sands on the south coast, this renowned hotel (telegraph.co.uk/tt-thefortress) offers an upbeat combination of style, good value and safari possibilities. It is in a great location for whale watching and can also arrange day trips to Udawalawe National Park, home to herds of wild elephant. There's plenty of choice for eating out, with three restaurants and many more options in nearby Galle. ♦ Western & Oriental (020 3588 6130; westernoriental.com) for a February half-term break, £7,895 including B&B accommodation in two beach rooms (each with an open-air bathroom).

16 WILDLIFE AND BEACH IN STYLE, SRI LANKA

Take in Wilpattu National Park, home to leopards, wild elephants, sloth bears



19 WILD COAST TENTED LODGE, SRI LANKA

The latest venture from the much-admired Resplendent Ceylon hotel company, Wild Coast Tented Lodge (resplendentceylon.com) opened recently. It is a wonderfully chic outfit combining the best of African-style luxury safari accommodation with Sri Lankan wildlife viewing. Set on the edge of Yala National Park, it offers 28 tented suites, each with private deck

and more, then go dolphin watching – and enjoy a beachside break.

♦ For a February half-term break, Experience Travel (020 3504 9937; experiencetravelgroup.com), offers a stylish two-centre trip in the beautiful, less-visited north west, with accommodation at the charming Notary's House (notaryshouse.srilanka.com), chic and historic Bethany 101 (bethany101.com), and Tented Dolphin Beach resort (telegraph.co.uk/tt-dolphinbeachresort), £7,157 including breakfast and three days half board.

17 CONSTANCE BELLE MARE PLAGE, MAURITIUS

You're in an engagingly family-friendly world at this luxury resort on the north-east coast. Constance

and retro copper bath tub – some suites have plunge pools. ♦ Original Travel (020 3582 4990; originaltravel.co.uk), £2,350, including breakfast, domestic transfers by air, a game drive, a cookery class, sundowners by the beach and a private dinner.

20 CORAL AND OUTDOOR ADVENTURE, MAURITIUS

Snorkel on the west coast, explore bird-rich Black River Gorges National Park and enjoy a catamaran adventure. ♦ Fleewinter (020 712 0019, fleewinter.com) offers a week's private activity package with accommodation at small and peaceful Sand Suites Resort & Spa (telegraph.co.uk/tt-sandsuites) on a long white-sand beach near Flic-en-Flac, from £1,312 half board, guided south-coast drive, a day's sailing and more.



Unless otherwise stated, prices are per person for seven nights in early December or January (low season), based on two sharing and including flights and transfers. With family holidays, prices are for seven nights for a family of four sharing, including flights and transfers over February half term, except for the package to Mauritius, which is for travel in December.