

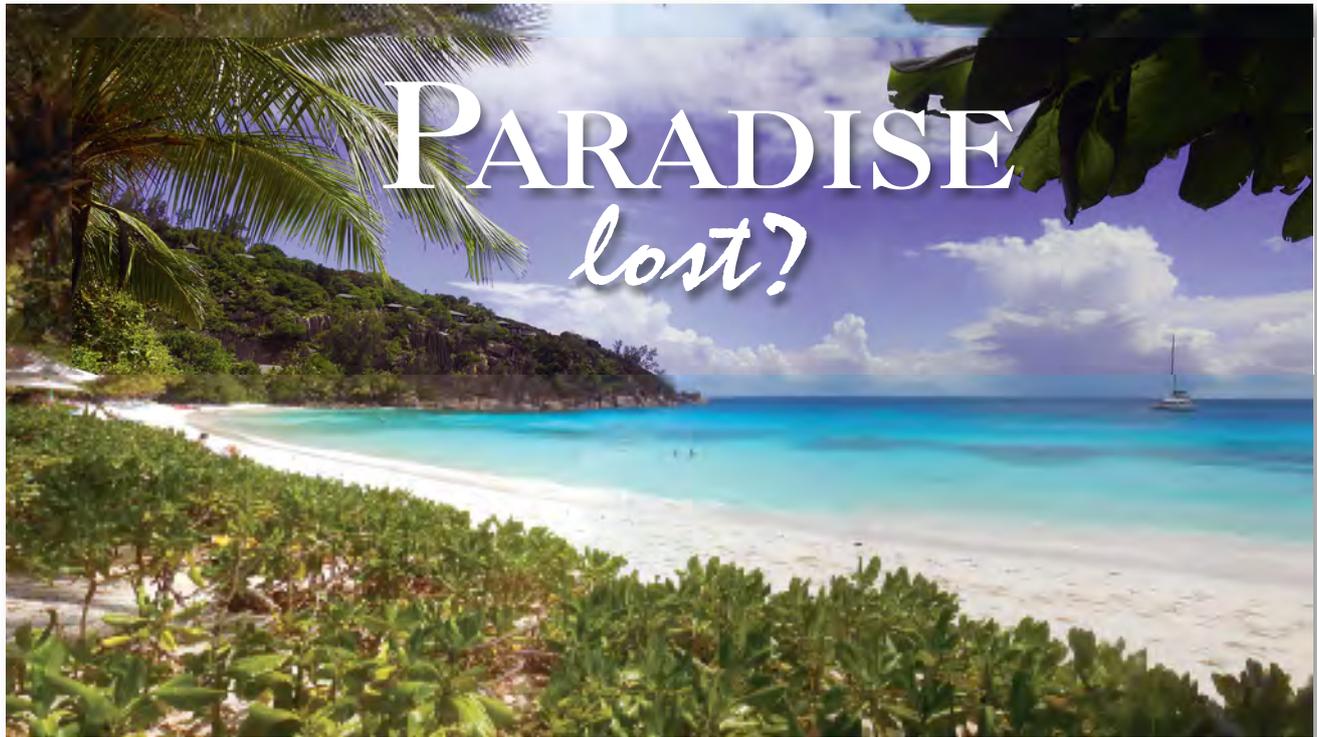


# THE GALLIVANTER'S GUIDE<sup>©</sup>



SEYCHELLES  
TWELVE PAGE  
BONUS ISSUE

JULY 2015. VOL.25. No. 7 **SETTING THE BENCHMARK FOR HIGH-END TRAVELLERS**



*Glorious white sand beach and turquoise waters, at Four Seasons Seychelles, on Mahé.*

**T**he main tourism islands of the Indian Ocean; Mauritius, The Maldives and The Seychelles, present entirely different experiences, from super expensive white-sand private islands in The Maldives, to chic French inspired resorts in Mauritius. But what of The Seychelles? This month, Philippe Servais checks out 3 high-end resorts and wonders if Paradise is, in many cases, lost.

Just a few degrees south of the Equator, The Seychelles comprises a cluster of 1,500 coral and granite islands. There is no doubt that this is a tropical paradise, with azure waters, exceptional wildlife and some of the most enticing palm-fringed

beaches in the world. The Seychelles used to be known as the five-star islands with three-star hotels; most of them largely State-run; but things started to change slowly at the end of the 1990s, when the



*Pool deck of 2-bedroom, #206, at Four Seasons.*

Socialist government decided to embrace high-end tourism. However, life moves at a slower pace here and local staff, which makes up 50% of hotel employees, is charming, but many struggle with the concept of world-class hospitality. Cuisine is also an issue; the quality of the local produce poor and most of the food imported, so that it is sometimes easier to find apples and kiwis than mangos and papayas. But can you still find Paradise?

### **Four Seasons Resort Seychelles.**

By far the largest and most developed island of this archipelago, Mahé,

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*At Four Seasons Resort Seychelles, the private pool of Ocean-view Villa, #104, which has a 180° view of the ocean.*

with its mist-shrouded granite peaks covered in jungle and its string of glorious beaches, remains my favourite Seychelles island. As is their wont, Four Seasons managed to secure one of the most beautiful and secluded spots on the island's magical west coast, a 35 minute drive from Mahé's tiny, slow-moving, International airport.

As I arrived at the reception pavilion, which is submerged in dense emerald forest, I was captivated by the splendid views of Petite Anses's sugary white beach, contrasting black granite cliffs and turquoise waters; the small lobby tucked amongst

groves of giant bamboo, cinnamon trees and fragrant frangipani.

The 67 natural timber Villas and Suites resemble tree houses, and are perched on stilts within 170 acres of lush tropical forest. Great care was taken to respect and preserve the ecosystem when building this resort, which, unlike some, was obviously designed around nature.

The resort's steep hills mean that a buggy service is required to go just about anywhere; but I must admit that it worked rather well and I never had to wait more than a few minutes.

I stayed in the remarkably private Hilltop Ocean-view Villa, #104, which with a 180° view of the ocean, has one of the best panoramas in the resort.

At 2,002 sq ft, these spacious Villas are identical in size and layout and feature sophisticated interiors that mix French Créole chic with Colonial architecture, vivid colours and hand-planed teak wood floors. Contemporary local art adorns the whitewashed timber-slat walls, turning the high ceilinged space into a warm, residential habitat.

The pale yellow bathrooms are gorgeous, with their antique wardrobes, large out-



*Interior of Ocean-view Villa, #104, at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles.*

*All photography by Philippe Servais for The Gallivanter's Guide©*

door showers, indoor marble showers and glass-enclosed sunken tubs, which merge with each Villa's large infinity pool; whilst the split-level outdoor deck features a dining table with two chairs, two loungers and a rather uncomfortable daybed situated in a separate open air balé; the only negative I managed to find.

The private pools are unusually large and are accessed via your outdoor shower or from the main sun deck.

I really enjoyed spending time in this Villa as it had a genuine sense of place. I cannot think of anything more uplifting than waking up each morning with the sun and double rainbows piercing the clouds after the early morning rains, or watching the flamboyant sunsets that graced the horizon each evening from my infinity pool.

Opt for a Hilltop Ocean-View Villa to make the most of the breathtaking views, especially those in the 100 series alongside Cotton Walk. Cotton Walk? Yes, street names are used to help us guests find our way, as the resort's footprint is so vast.

In the southern section of the resort, Hilltop Ocean-View Villa, #603 is particularly private, as it cannot be seen from the internal driveways. However, the resort recently created a new Villa category: the Serenity Villas. Supposedly, they offer greater priva-

am not so sure. The unit nextdoor to mine, Serenity Villa, #101, was not particularly private and Villa, #103 was overlooked by Villa, #102, which is reached via very steep steps. In the 600 series, I would say that

If you are looking at beachfront options, the Two-Bedroom Presidential Suite, #206 has an expansive deck with a large infinity pool and a garden leading to the beach, and is a much better option than the



*Incredible views from the tub, in Ocean-view Villa, #104, at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles.*

Serenity Villa, #607 is the one to go for.

There are also five Suites at the resort; their bedrooms similar to the regular Villas. However, the main living pavilions are decorated in a rather uninspired mix of French

beachfront 3-Bedroom Royal Suite, #310, which is rather dark and has obstructed views of the beach. Another good choice is the two-storey 2-Bedroom Hilltop Ocean-View Suite, #612.

Overall, I did not appreciate the 26 Private Residences, which are available in 3, 4 and 5-bedroom configurations. They are located on the northern and southern promontories, so are quite a distance from the heart of the resort and feature too much concrete for my liking.

The Suites and Villas come with a personal butler who arrives each morning to cook you a fresh breakfast; a much nicer idea than the usual room service. Talking of cuisine, it is generally excellent here, under Executive Chief Dave Minten. In fact, it was easily the best I have experienced in The Seychelles. As I write, though, numerous changes are afoot; the upcoming months seeing a rethink of all the food and beverage outlets. Zez, the modern European venue, will become a Pan-Asian restaurant, whilst the beachside, Kannel will become an Italian restaurant, and a Steakhouse will be created in one of the unused meeting rooms.

Breakfast at the open-air Zez comprises a pleasant International buffet complemented by à la carte. Make sure you try the



*The very informal Lobby, at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles.*

cy, and instead of a daybed in the outdoor pavilion, you get a dining table. An outdoor cocoon lounger was also added and bathroom amenities were enhanced. Are they worth the premium they command? I

countryside meets Crate & Barrel, with lots of dark brown furniture and carpets. I am not too sure what prompted this unfortunate design, as the Villas are so tastefully done.



*Master bedroom of the 2-bedroom Hilltop Ocean View Suite, #612, at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles.*

delicious Créole crab Benedict with curry & chilli infused Hollandaise sauce; the scrambled eggs with shrimps and spicy tomato Rougaille. The relaxed Zez Lounge, meanwhile, offers a selection of drinks and cocktails and wonderfully fresh sushi and sashimi, served with warm edamame and miso soup. My locally caught snapper nigiris and Californian rolls were delicious.

The less formal poolside Kannel serves a Créole influenced menu and a selection of International favourites beneath soaring thatched roofs. Several themed nights are organised each week, including a popular Fish Market and an Arabic night. I am not normally a fan of themed nights, but I real-

ly enjoyed the Créole evening, which was, thankfully, not buffet-style and was served at my table. How civilised.

Despite sensational ocean views from its hilltop location at the highest point of the resort, the Spa design disappoints. My Spa experience began in the reception area, which, disarmingly, more resembled a souvenir shop, selling everything from jewellery to cupcakes. Cupcakes? In a Spa?

There is an adjacent relaxation room, a juice bar, a beauty salon, an attractive yoga studio and a rooftop platform from which you can sip Champagne and admire the view; but to reach one of the eight treatment rooms, you need to backtrack through rec-

eption, exit the building and go down a concrete outdoor staircase, which is not ideal. My double treatment room had an outdoor tub, a shower and private changing facilities, but already felt dated. I chose an excellent Hillside Signature Fusion massage, which starts with a salt and cinnamon-leaf foot bath. They use handmade biodegradable Yin-King products normally, but I opted for a balancing chemical-free Sodashi oil instead. My treatment was followed by a delicious flaked snapper salad & roasted earth vegetables, served bento box style, in the privacy of my villa. No cupcakes, though.

Adjacent to Kannel and surrounded by cinnamon trees, lies a huge beachside salt-water pool. However, the main attraction here is the sublime beach; a long crescent of stunningly beautiful powdery white sand bordered by a brilliant blue sea. It is rela-



*Cuisine, at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles.*

tively sheltered from strong currents and big waves by an outer reef and makes the incredibly warm waters of the Indian Ocean irresistible. Here you will find a watersports



*Surrounded by cinnamon trees, the vast saltwater pool, at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles, is on the edge of the ocean.*



*At Four Seasons Resort Seychelles, Zez Restaurant, which currently serves modern European cuisine, will be transformed into a Pan-Asian restaurant.*

pavilion offering scuba diving, snorkelling and a myriad of other water activities, plus an informative reef restoration centre to help protect the coral in the bay.

Loungers and sun umbrellas are a tad too close to each other, so that on a busy day it might become a little crowded on this section of the beach. However, the staff was always happy to find me a more secluded spot away from the main action. Indeed, it seems that Four Seasons have perfected the art of the beach experience. My set up always came with cold towels, pineapple-infused ice water, an Evian spray and a regular supply of frozen goodies.

It is hard to become bored here. Activities range from hilltop meditation, to cooking classes. There is also a great gym, with

a good range of Technogym equipment, located just off the lobby. If you are travelling en famille, the beachside Kid's Club will keep your children entertained, whilst elsewhere, there is a shop with fashions and jewellery for us adults.

Seychellois often seem somewhat shy at first, but once you break the ice, they are the most charming, chatty and friendly people. Service was excellent, professional and warm hearted. General Manager, Alex Porteous, (since departed to open Four Seasons Kyoto) and Resort Manager, Nihat Yucel were obviously doing something right, as guests invariably had broad smiles on their faces.

I loved this relaxed resort with its enchanting location, gorgeous villas and pic-

ture perfect beach. It is easily the best option in the Seychelles and the kind of place where I could have happily spent a few more blissful days.

[www.fourseasons.com/seychelles](http://www.fourseasons.com/seychelles)

**Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓+**

### **Frégate Island Private.**

Frégate Island Private is 50 km east of the main island of Mahé; a super peaceful property that can only be reached by a ZilAir helicopter, chartered Air Seychelles flight or via the resort's speedboat.

First and foremost, Frégate is a wildlife sanctuary, teeming with thousands of species, some of them endangered. It is home to more than 2,000 Giant Aldabra Tortoises



*View of the pool deck of Villa, #9, at Frégate Island Private; now managed by The Oetker Collection.*



*Interior of the Colonial-style Villa, #9, at Frégate Island Private.*

and to one of the world's rarest birds; the Seychelles Magpie Robin, which was saved from complete extinction in this very place.

Frégate's owner pioneered the concept of a luxury private island resort in the Seychelles when he opened it in 1998. However, things started to get really interesting when Oetker Collection signed a manage-

by helicopter, not by seaplane, and my butler's name was Stéphane, not Tattoo. I was also greeted by Wayne Kafcsak, the General Manager, who has 35 years of experience running various resorts and private islands in the Caribbean.

I was offered a cold towel and a fruit cocktail, then Stéphane drove my personal

Bedroom Villas, scattered on the northern shore of the island. They are located on both sides of Frégate House, which hosts the main restaurant, the Pirate's Bar, a wine cellar, and below, the main infinity pool, the beautiful Anse Bambou and its beach club, bar and restaurant.

The well-appointed Villas offer a similar layout, with three connecting pavilions; the small dining pavilion separating the bedroom and bathroom pavilion from the living area. These had just benefited from a soft refurbishment; the native mahogany and African chamfuta woods darkened and fabrics replaced. The atmosphere is Colonial, with cool marble floors, high-ceilinged thatched roofs, oversized cream sofas and huge four poster beds with Frette linens; the fresh décor enhanced by bright orange and green cushions accompanied by gorgeous floral arrangements that mix heliconias and birds of paradise. That said, the look is not particularly original, and I felt that I could have been anywhere in the tropics. The Villas, however, are certainly spacious, the beds are extremely comfortable and the air-conditioning is, happily, efficient. The only thing missing is an Ipod dock or somewhere to plug in an Mp3 player.

A vast split level terrace leads to a sizeable infinity pool and jacuzzi, with glorious views of the Indian Ocean, together with the islands of La Digue and Félicité in the distance; perfect to watch the mesmerising



*The terrace of Frégate House, at Frégate Island Private.*

ment contract two years ago and planned some much needed renovations.

Arriving is an adventure in itself, feeling a little like the opening sequence of the famous 80's TV show, Fantasy Island. The difference in my episode was that I arrived

buggy to my 1-Bedroom Villa, #9, after giving me a brief introduction to the island. Bear in mind that getting from A to B might take more time than you think, as you have to share the roads with so many turtles.

The resort comprises sixteen 1 and 2-



*2-bedroom Villa, #15/#16, at Frégate Island Private, has a unique half-moon-shaped private pool.*

dance of the fruit bats, which is only dangerous if you are a mango.

The private pools are flanked on one side by a dining pavilion and on the other by a huge covered daybed, whilst bathrooms boast twin vanities and indoor/outdoor showers. Each Villa has its own buggy, replete with water bottles, cookie jar, towels and umbrellas. Mine magically appeared every morning facing the right direction, no matter how I parked it the night before.

Villas, #1 to #8 have direct access to the white sand beach, but I would avoid Villas, #1 and #2, located right behind the grassy airstrip, as they lack unobstructed views, and in a place as beautiful as this, a stunning and ever present view is a must.

The three 2-bedroom Villas are similar to the 1-bedroom, with the addition of a second bedroom pavilion. Out of these, my favourite is Villa, #3, which has a spectacular location right above the beach, with beautiful sunrise views.

If you are travelling with a group of friends, there is also the Banyan Hill Estate, which sits on a secluded rocky promontory, high above the marina and the yacht club. With three separate Residences, the estate comes with a personal cook, butler and maid. Personally, though, I found this compound strangely disjointed and not particularly attractive.

The island's all-inclusive concept includes full-board, soft drinks, house wines, local beers, laundry and an extensive selection of activities, such as deep-sea diving or the

fascinating morning nature walk, followed by breakfast in a tree house.

Although Frégate House is where you will find the main restaurant, library and bar, you are encouraged to eat anywhere on property, be it a beach barbecue or a romantic lunch on any of the seven private beaches.

On my first morning, I headed to Frégate House for breakfast. High on a bluff, the décor of this rather austere main dining room manages not to detract from the mesmerising views of the Indian Ocean below.

hungry birds! I like birds, but on Frégate, you cannot escape them, or indeed, the other assorted wildlife. I experienced a similar issue in the outdoor dining pavilion of my Villa. There were so many birds and lizards fighting for my bread basket that I had to retreat indoors. Lunch on the beach produced another stressful experience, and although I am very well used to the tropics, on Frégate, I never used the outdoor showers, as the thought of a close encounter with Jurassic Park-sized millipedes was not particularly appealing. I know they are total-



*Cosy Colonial style in Villa, #9, at Frégate Island Private.*

It was a pity, therefore, that I did not feel like spending more than five minutes inside, as it was stifling hot and lacking adequate ventilation. I also spent most of my time fighting off dozens of very aggressive and

ly harmless, but they are so numerous that at night they seem to fall from the sky. I am an avid fan of National Geographic, but after a few days on Frégate, I considered cancelling my subscription.



*Spa suite, at Frégate Island Private.*

Cuisine on the island is under the helm of the newly appointed Executive Chef, Alan Larch, who used to be at the Fairmont Royal Pavilion, Barbados, and ex-Four Seasons Food & Beverage Manager, Diego Guerreschi. Frégate prides itself on its agricultural self-sufficiency, with fruit, vegetables and herbs grown organically in the gardens and greenhouses. That, coupled with the fact that Oetker is very serious about food, gave me high hopes that the cuisine would be exceptional.

Sadly, my first dinner at Frégate House was a total disaster. The dessert, promisingly named 'textures of chocolate', took 25 minutes to arrive and proved to be an extremely dry chocolate soufflé. I drove back to my Villa, still feeling hungry and fantasising about the Welsh lamb stew that I had the night before on my Emirates

flight. Room service breakfasts proved equally depressing and the club sandwich at the beach restaurant was inedible, with a side salad that tasted like plastic. A request for mustard involved a walk back up the hill to the main kitchen, as absolutely nothing is stocked in the beach restaurant.

Your safest choice here are the barbecues, which do not disappoint; but then, it is hard to go wrong with some grilled seafood and a salad.

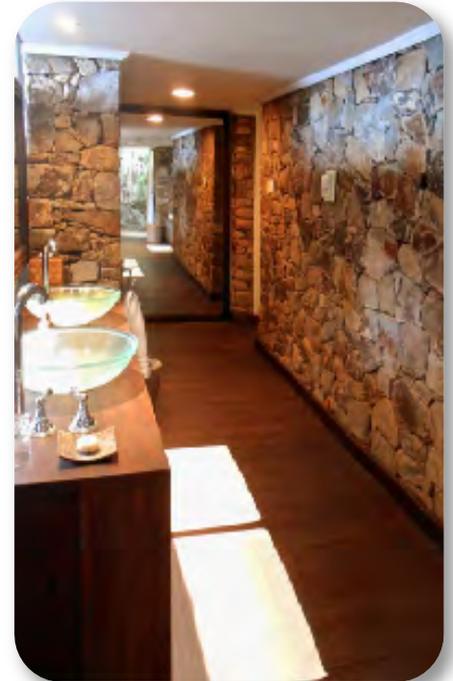
I spent most of my days hopping from one magnificent beach to another. Reached by steep stone steps cut through the jungle, palm-fringed Anse Victorin was voted one of the most beautiful beaches in the world and is certainly breathtaking.

Each beach is equipped with a couple of loungers, chairs and tables. Coolers are stocked with water and soft drinks, although I did notice on a couple of occasions that they were not refilled. Too many beaches, too little time?

Food is just a phone call away. Sadly, nobody thought of providing a menu, and

as a result, ordering anything invariably involves a lengthy conversation with a server.

The simple yet attractive Colonial-style Spa sits between huge banyan trees and granite boulders on a hill overlooking the



*Bathroom of Villa, #16, at Frégate Island Private.*

ocean. A new Spa Director from the Philippines, rumoured to have worked for Amanresorts, should already be on site when you read this. Indeed, numerous changes are planned, including the introduction of a line of International skincare



*Private pool deck of Panorama Villa, #272, at Raffles Praslin.*



*A Spa suite, at Raffles Praslin.*

products and a move away from Ayurvedic treatments.

Right now, the Spa uses Natural Nourishment products, a local brand which, interestingly, contains organic ingredients cultivated locally. Unfortunately, nobody could tell me exactly what else was in them.

There is also a small but adequate gym in a neighbouring glass pavilion, overlooking a coconut grove, where dozens of tortoises roam freely.

Frégate is not a spontaneous kind of place and staff is keen to plan your activities well ahead; your butler able to arrange whatever you want, whenever you want it. Indeed,

staff is not a problem here; everyone friendly and well-trained, which makes Frégate tough to score. The island is extremely private, its beaches are spectacular, the Villas comfortable and service surprisingly good; but were my expectations fulfilled? Unlike the characters of Fantasy Island, who invariably leave happy and contented, I felt feeling disappointed and hungry.

[www.fregate.com](http://www.fregate.com)

**Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓+**

### **Raffles Praslin.**

Raffles opened in February 2011 on the

north-west coast of the serene island of Praslin. Often referred to as the mythological Garden of Eden, it is home to the famous UNESCO-listed Vallée de Mai.

A mountain was bulldozed and a coastal road re-routed to make way for this 86 Villa resort, which is set on 30 acres of Anse Takamaka. With its hideous main building and concrete Villas sticking out like a sore thumb, it is definitely not love at first sight. The fact that its Stalinist inspired architecture managed to win an award for design is beyond me!

Check-in took place in a depressing and poorly ventilated reception pavilion located above the cavernous main building, which houses most of the facility's bars and restaurants. I grabbed a seat, was offered a welcome drink and was told, in broken English, about the resort's amenities.

Raffles is a brand that understandably attracts a large number of Chinese guests, hence the presence of quite a few untutored Chinese junior staff. Personally, I love the cultural interaction; however communication could be frustrating and simple requests were often met with baffled looks. I do not think that, at deluxe level, asking for extra milk in your coffee should require the use of an English-Mandarin phrasebook.

Raffles Praslin has seen three different General Managers in four years, which is a



*A Raffles 1-Bedroom Suite, at Raffles Praslin.*



*Panoramic Pool Villa, #272, at Raffles Praslin.*

worrying trend. Service, under Christopher Ganster (now managing Laucala in Fiji) was largely inconsistent and untutored. More often than not, phone calls were not answered, mini-bars not re-stocked and special requests ignored. That said, staff was friendly and eager to please.

Tucked into the hills, the tightly packed Villas are reached by golf carts via a maze of steep concrete pathways crisscrossing the property. The almost identical villas are accessed via a flight of steps, from whence a door opens onto a deck with a small plunge pool, an outdoor sala containing a daybed, a dining table, a fridge and two loungers.

As I entered my Panoramic Pool Villa, #272, I was treated to a jaw-dropping 180° view of the gorgeous Takamaka Bay and Curieuse Island. Things were looking up.

Designed by Wilson and Associates, the interior décor is modern, with a vague tropical theme. You could easily think that you had landed in Palm Beach or somewhere in Southern California. Comfortable and well-appointed, this would have impressed me 20 years ago, but today, the wow factor is decidedly absent.

The split-level bedrooms feature pale wooden floors, Praslin granite walls, supremely comfortable Sealy beds and pink

sofas facing the floor-to-ceiling windows. Complimentary wi-fi is available throughout the resort and even works on the beach. A nice touch are the easels set up with sketching paper, should the views inspire the artist in you.

Narrow dressing areas with ample storage space and writing desks connect the bedrooms to the cream marble bathrooms, with large tubs set between two mosaic-inlaid alcoves that afford views of the Bay.

The overall maintenance of the Villas is not of the highest quality. Even after such a short time, there is scuffed furniture and worn out fabrics, which surprised me.



*The main pool and bar, at Raffles Praslin.*

If you value privacy, do not settle for anything less than a Panoramic Pool Villa, preferably on the northern side of the resort. They are closer to the pool or beach, but are quite a distance from the main building and service areas. Villas, #271, #272 and #273 are good choices.

The big, airy Raffles 1 or 2-Bedroom Suites feature larger pools, living rooms and dining areas, complemented by private butlers. Again, it is important to select a Raffles Panorama Suite for greater privacy and better views. I do not see the point of staying in one of the two Royal Beachfront Villas, as they have no direct beach access.



*The Lozean restaurant, at Raffles Praslin.*

I found that the cuisine, under Executive Chef, Chris Meredith, who joined Raffles in February from Sandy Lane in Barbados,



*The Reception pavilion, at Raffles Praslin.*



*The Takamaka Terrace & Shisha Lounge, at Raffles Praslin.*

was decidedly average. A relatively pleasant International buffet breakfast is served in the Lozean restaurant which, with its pale yellow walls, looks like a cross between a school canteen and a second rate airport lounge. It is definitely not a place that encourages you to linger. A few tables are laid out on the narrow terrace, but it was way too hot to eat outside during my stay.

In the evening, Lozean transforms itself into an upscale Mediterranean restaurant, and thanks to some effective mood lighting looks 100% better. Unfortunately, the cuisine does not improve incrementally.

Elsewhere in the main building, you can choose the smart Danzil Bar & Lounge for cocktails and cigars or the dreary rooftop Takamaka Terrace and Shisha Lounge.

Hidden in lush vegetation and steps away from the beach, the stunning cobalt blue swimming pool area, with its two restau-

rants, is my favourite part of the resort. Shaped like narrow fan blades, it is the largest pool in the Indian Ocean.

The Pool Bar and Restaurant serves light International fare for lunch and themed buffets or à la carte in the evening, whilst Curieuse, the Pan-Asian restaurant and sushi bar, which is set in an attractive open air wooden pavilion, serves meals in a small air-conditioned dining room or on a series of garden-set dining platforms that are lit with flaming torches at night.

The 500 metre beach comprises three narrow crescents of white sand; only one of which is serviced by staff. It is a good swimmable beach, but from my experience, somewhat below The Seychelles standard.

The signature Raffles Spa is the largest in the Indian Ocean, but as we all know, spas are more about the quality of the treatments than their size. Erin, my ex-The Legian Balinese therapist, gave me an excellent 90 minute full body massage, using my own Dr Hauschka body oil, as they mostly use Kerstin Florian products here; but I do wonder why they provide thick, heavy robes in a tropical climate!

Elsewhere, there is a beauty salon and a small, under-equipped gym with defective equipment, which came as a bit of a shock.

As you can tell, I did not find this property particularly worthwhile. I tried to forgive its soulless architecture, the untutored service and the average food, but let us not forget that this is an iconic luxury brand, and at this level, guests deserve a much higher calibre experience. Frankly, until something truly world-class comes to the island, I think that it is better to visit lovely Praslin as a side trip from Mahé.

[www.raffles.com/praslin](http://www.raffles.com/praslin)

**Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓**

# GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



**F**OR ALL OUR READERS WHO HAVE BEEN FRUSTRATED by **Grand-Hotel du Cap-Ferrat's** 5-night minimum stay in high season, I am happy to report that new management company, **Four Seasons** have reduced the July-August minimum to three nights and the May, June, September minimum to two nights. New GM is Four Seasons' man, François-Regis Simon. I am also very pleased to report that the on-shore building work at **Four Seasons Resort Dubai** is now complete and the off-shore work is scheduled to finish at the end of this month. Book up soon, because I hear that the suites are going fast for the Christmas/New Year period.

**I** THOUGHT THAT THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES HAD RENEGED over LVMH's ambitious renovation project for the iconic Parisian store, La Samaritaine, which overlooks the Seine; but apparently they have had second thoughts and the project is set to go ahead, with a **Cheval Blanc Paris** hotel, shops, offices, crèche and low-cost housing. Good decision!

**I**F YOU WANT TO SEE WHAT ADRIAN ZECHA HAD PLANNED for his next generation Amanresort, then watch out for the opening at the end of this year of his original visionary **Amanera** on Playa Grande, Dominican Republic, as it is rumoured to be a 'Marmite moment' - you will either love it or hate it.

**C**HECK OUT THE FIRST LUXE HOTEL TO OPEN in Jackson Hole, Wyoming in 15 years. The boutique-sized **Hotel Jackson** opened in June and looks rather wonderful. [www.hoteljackson.com](http://www.hoteljackson.com)

**I**F YOU WERE WONDERING WHAT ALL THE NOISE WAS ABOUT in **Dubai**, then look to the right of Four Seasons and watch the emergence of **Bulgari's** gated community, on an offshore island, with 100 rooms and 20 Villas, apartments, yacht club and marina.

**P**ERTH'S ICONIC TREASURY BUILDINGS in Western Australia were destined to become an **Amanresort**, but the group pulled out and the project appeared to stagnate, so I am very happy to announce that **COMO Hotels & Resorts** have taken over the **Perth** mantle, with **COMO The Treasury**, which is set to open later this year, retaining architect, Kerry Hill. Indeed, perhaps we should be looking more closely at COMO these days, now that they have Hansjoerg Meier as CEO.

**I**AM ALWAYS BEMOANING THE LACK OF PROPER BEACH RESORTS in North America, so I was delighted to hear that Rosewood are creating a 122-room, 48-suite gem in Montecito, Santa Barbara, called **Rosewood Miramar Beach**, which is just 80 miles NW of Los Angeles and is set to open in 2018. On 16 acres of beachfront, many of the suites will be in low-rise cottages and bungalows, from which you can step straight onto the sand.

**T**RUST SOHO HOUSE TO DO SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT in the English countryside. About to open is **Soho Farmhouse**; a unique village-style rural estate in Great Tew, neat Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. It is set within a 100-acre estate, with 40 differently configured cabins, one 1-4 bedroom Cottage and a 7-bedroom Farmhouse and is designed for Soho House Members and outside guests, offering everything from a Cowshed Spa to lakes and pools and plenty of activities, including horseriding. How refreshing! [www.sohofarmhouse.com](http://www.sohofarmhouse.com)

**I**F YOU WANT TO PERFECT YOUR PASTA OR PASTRY SKILLS, head to **Lime Wood** in Hampshire and their just completed cookery school, **Harnett Holder & Co Backstage**. Not too serious, but plenty of fun.

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Fax: +44 (0)1666 860063. Email: [gallivanterguide@virgin.net](mailto:gallivanterguide@virgin.net) Website: [www.gallivanterguide.com](http://www.gallivanterguide.com)

**EDITOR/PUBLISHER** LYN MIDDLEHURST. **MANAGING DIRECTOR** DAVID MASLIN. **HOTEL CRITIC** PHILIPPE SERVAIS.

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