

The Daily Telegraph

ultratravel

YOUR GUIDE TO HEAVEN ON EARTH

SUMMER 2011

BAREFOOT IN EDEN

Shoes off on the Seychelles' greenest private island

Plus

**TASMANIA: COOL ISLAND, HOT SPOTS
LONDON'S HOTEL CUISINE REVIVAL
DRIVING THE CALIFORNIA DREAM**

THE WORLD'S BEST **100** HOTELS, AIRLINES, CRUISES, SPAS AND MORE...

10 BAREFOOT ISLAND RETREATS

No five-star resort can call itself entirely eco – yet. But from Lake Malawi to the Great Barrier Reef there is a growing emphasis on local sourcing, sustainable materials and renewable energy

Song Saa, Koh Rong, Cambodia

Unspoilt, barely inhabited islands, empty white-sand beaches and untouched coral reefs still exist off Cambodia, just as they did off Thailand 30 years ago. The Koh Rong archipelago, half an hour by speedboat from the airport at Sihanoukville, was virtually unknown even to Cambodians when Rory and Melita Hunter, a young Australian couple, came across it on their honeymoon. It struck them as the perfect place to realise their dream of creating a luxurious but sustainable resort that might help shape Cambodia's fledgling tourist industry into something better than the Thai model. Five years on, the result of their endeavours – employing local people, local materials, cutting-edge eco technology and an expert-led conservation and community programme – will open in December with 25 over-water villas. *Doubles from £429 per night, full-board (00 855 77 777 439, songsaa.com).*



Green shoots (clockwise, from left) The two-mile stretch of white sand on Petit St Vincent; quiet reflection at the Banyan Tree Madivaru, the Maldives; the pool and timber villas at Con Dao, Vietnam; and Sindabezi, the river-island camp upstream from Victoria Falls, Zambia

Wilson Island, Great Barrier Reef, Australia

Forty miles off Queensland, this private island takes a maximum of a dozen guests, staying in six open-fronted tents overlooking the beach and the ocean. Accommodation is comfortable but basic. Meals take place around a communal table, and solar-powered showers are available in a shared amenities area. A library of books about marine biology serves as a diversion from snorkelling. The extra-lucky may witness turtles laying their eggs on the beach, or the miracle of dozens of hatchlings emerging simultaneously from the sand. *Doubles from £690, full-board (00 61 3 9413 6284, wilsonisland.com).*



Kaya Mawa, Likoma Island, Malawi

Near the border with Mozambique, on the 360-mile-long, crystal-clear Lake Malawi that covers one-fifth of this beautiful but neglected country, Kaya Mawa makes a romantic spot for post-safari r&r. The accommodation comprises 11 airy thatched cottages built from teak and stone, each with a sunken bath and shady beach terrace; some have a private pool, and one – perfect for honeymooners – is on its own minute private island. *Doubles from £454, all-inclusive (00 265 9993 18358, kayamawa.com).*

Con Dao, Vietnam

A hundred miles off south-east Vietnam, the Con Dao Islands are another south-east Asian group starting to be developed as a holiday destination. Eighty per cent of the archipelago has been designated marine or national park. The mile-long beach on the largest island, Con Son – 45 minutes by air from Ho Chi Minh City – has a new Six Senses resort. Fifty villas, all built with reclaimed and sustainable materials, range along the sand, each with an infinity pool and indoor/outdoor bathroom. But why the air con? *Doubles from £310, b&b (00 84 64 3831 222, sixsenses.com).*

Havelock, Andaman Islands, India

The Andamans, 600 miles off the east coast of India, are covered in dense rainforest, ringed by coral reefs and blessed with some of the best

beaches in Asia. Of the 570 islands, fewer than 40 are inhabited. Some, home to aboriginal tribes, are off-limits to visitors. The locally-run Barefoot at Havelock has 18 thatched beach cottages scattered along the forest's edge. After dark, guests use torches to find their way along forest paths; it's not for the faint-hearted. *Doubles from £90, b&b (00 91 44 4231 6376, barefootindia.com).*

Sindabezi, Livingstone, Zambia

Upstream from Victoria Falls, this river-island camp is home to five thatched, open-sided chalets. In each, a four-poster bed draped in a mosquito net overlooks the Zambezi, so guests can fall asleep to the sound of rushing water. There's an outdoor shower under the trees, and a roll-top bath from which to contemplate the wildlife. The island has no electricity; solar panels concealed among the thatch heat the water. At dusk, staff light hurricane lamps on the dining deck where fish fresh from the river is a highlight. In the chill of dawn, the lamps are lit again for the early-morning game drive. The determinedly eco-conscious can paddle their own canoe to the sister camp, Tongabezi, rather than take the motor boat. *Doubles from £500, all-inclusive (00 260 213 327 450, tongabezi.com).*

Banyan Tree Madivaru, Maldives

Life for the dozen guests on this remote and tiny island is lived in the open and under canvas, but in beach tents of Napoleonic grandeur, fitted out with espresso machines and iPod docks. Each of the six complexes has a large living tent set up with campaign table and chairs, a spacious sleeping tent, a bathroom tent with a roll-top bath and Toto WC, and an outdoor shower. Add a sandbar for candlelit dinners and a dining tent with a good local chef, and it's a set-up begging to be rented in its entirety. *Doubles from £1,700, all-inclusive (00 960 666 0760, banyantree.com).*

Chole Mjini, off Mafia Island, Tanzania

One of the smallest of the outlying islands off Zanzibar, Chole Mjini offers seven slightly ramshackle tree houses built with local materials. Just feet from the water's edge, they are presided over by two expatriate biologists whose enthusiasm – not to mention 15 years of diving experience here, among 400 species of fish and brilliant coral reefs – makes the island an appealing bolthole for hardy souls who want to snorkel, dive or do nothing. *Doubles from £218, full-board (00 255 787 712 427, cholemjini.com).*

Medjumbe, Quirimbas, Mozambique

Twenty years ago, no one would have dreamt of holidaying in Mozambique. But while civil war was ripping up the country, the Quirimbas – 32 small, white-sand islands – remained untouched. These days, with war a distant memory, villa hotels such as Ibo, Coral Island and Medjumbe – 13 thatched cottages on a beautiful beach – are making the Quirimbas the hippest of barefoot holiday destinations. *Doubles from £430, all-in (00 27 11 658 0633, medjumberesort.com).*

Petit St Vincent, West Indies

Forty miles off St Vincent, in the Grenadines, PSV is one of the remotest spots in the Caribbean, with 115 rolling acres of vegetation and two miles of white sand providing a peaceful, breezy backdrop to the 22 stone-built cottages scattered around the island. There are no TVs, no phones but Hobies, Sunfish and kayaks to sail. Groomed but uncomplicated, PSV was first developed in 1966, when two yachtmen acquired the island. New owners will close the resort for September and October, reopening with a new library, small spa, yoga centre and children's tree house. *Doubles from £555, all-in (001 954 963 7401, psvresort.com).*