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# Mauritius: Lessons in the lagoons

In Mauritius, *James Litston* discovers marine life that's as memorable and showstopping as the island's luxury resorts.

I don't think I've ever swum in water as clear as this. Sunlight is reflecting off the sandy seabed three metres below, lending the water shades of



SHARELINES



Take another look at  
Mauritius' sensational  
marine life

turquoise and sapphire blue.

The visibility is exceptional, allowing me to appreciate patches of coral scattered across this tranquil lagoon. Appearing in branch, mushroom and finger forms, their variety seems almost endless; and I spot swarming schools of colourful, tropical fish everywhere.

Conditions are as excellent as one might expect of the Indian Ocean, but I'm not in Thailand, the Maldives or one of the region's famed sealife sites. I'm in Mauritius, which despite being almost entirely

fringed by offshore reefs, is surprisingly unknown as a diving destination.

It is a misconception that the luxurious Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita is aiming to counteract with its newly-launched Marine Discovery Programme.

## Reef rewards

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I've signed up for the programme's Reef Discovery snorkelling trip today, and accompanying me is Jo Eames, the resort's marine educator. She explains that the programme (run in partnership with conservation body WiseOceans) aims to showcase the diverse wildlife in the lagoon on which Four Seasons sits. As well as operating an information kiosk on one of the resort's beaches, Jo escorts daily snorkelling trips and is planning a coral restoration project on a degraded section

of reef.

“It’s so rewarding to introduce guests to the colourful world just offshore,” she says as we race across the lagoon for the 25-minute speedboat transfer.

Floating above a particularly vibrant bank of coral reef, Jo points out different types of damselfish that inhabit these living labyrinths. There are black-and-white humbugs and electric-blue chromis, plus butterflyfish in gleaming, jewel tones. We dive down to inspect an impressive table coral and find juvenile damselfish – perfect miniatures of their parents – hiding among its branches.

We also spot a brilliantly-hued clownfish among an anemone’s tentacles. It’s a Mauritian anemonefish – endemic to these islands - and my favourite discovery of the day. Less welcome is a crown-of-thorns starfish wrapped around a head of

coral, effectively killing it by feeding on its sea anemones. Jo explains that the population of crown-of-thorns starfish has boomed due to over-harvesting of triton seashells – a major sea star predator – to supply the tourist market for souvenirs.

## **Local learning**

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It is messages like this that drive home the importance of marine education, as surely anyone who has been on Jo's trips would think twice about buying seashells. As well as experiencing and learning about the local marine environment, guests will soon be able to participate in coral monitoring when Jo's reef restoration begins.

The Marine Discovery Programme may be new, but it's not the Four Seasons' only recent enhancement.

A 12-week refurbishment over

the summer saw the addition of six new Sanctuary Villas to its all-private-pool accommodations. These upgraded, waterfront villas (each with infinity pool) are located on a private island with beaches, water sports and a spa. The island looks onto the lagoon's mangrove forest, where Jo's Marvellous Mangroves snorkelling tour showcases the importance of this wildlife-rich habitat. But the Reef Discovery remains the most popular excursion. Why not recommend the experience and resort to upmarket clients – both couples and families – who might enjoy spicing up their sunshine break with a hands-on brush with nature.

**Book it:** Kuoni offers seven nights' half-board from £2,140pp (based on two sharing), including flights and private transfers. The two-hour Reef Discovery (bookable in resort) costs around