WHERE THE TURTLES AND TORTOISES ROAM:
AN ECO-ESCAPE IN THE SEYCHELLES

By Fiona Harper

A haven in the 1800s for runaway slaves escaping from nearby Praslin and La Digue islands, these days balmy Cousine Island is a tranquil hideaway for visitors seeking a stylish, nature-based experience. With half of the entire landmass of the island nation of the Seychelles designated as national parks and reserves, Cousine is a significant conservation zone comprising elegant beachfront villas that accommodate just ten guests at any time. It was one of the first island resorts to employ conservation officers full time, charged with conserving and protecting the unique flora and fauna. Giant tortoises roam the land while, above, migratory birds flock to the island for breeding and nesting. Down on the beach, up to 120 critically endangered hawksbill turtles nest annually, with hatchlings bursting through their sand-covered shells any time between November and March. Witnessing this rare event, according to Janine Henwood who lives on island and manages sales and reservations, is “truly wonderful. A once in a lifetime experience that is emotional and inspiring.”

Green turtles, rarely seen in the Seychelles, also occasionally nest on Cousine. A once in a lifetime experience that is emotional and inspiring.” Green turtles, rarely seen in the Seychelles, also occasionally nest on Cousine. Henwood was attracted to the island because of its astounding natural beauty and abundance of wildlife. “Guests have the opportunity to live among nature and to experience what the Seychelles would have been like a hundred years ago. By staying in the villas, guests directly contribute to the future of the island and conservation work being done here,” she enthuses. All funds raised by the Cousine Island Trust are used to run the island and its conservation program. Adopting a holistic philosophy to conserve rather than construct, wildlife is as welcome on the island as is human life, with the island offering some of the most intimate nature encounters available in the Seychelles. Management has taken an active approach to protecting and preserving endangered species, creating an important natural habitat in its truest form.

The 115-island archipelago of the Seychelles nation lies a few degrees south of the equator, east of Tanzania, with international visitors arriving at Seychelles International Airport on the main island of Mahe. Comprising 62 acres and just 0.87 miles in length, Cousine Island is less than four miles west of Praslin Island (the Seychelles’ second largest island) and 15 minutes by helicopter from Mahe. Guests are encouraged to arrive by helicopter rather than boat transfer to reduce the risk of introducing foreign species to this pristine environment. With an ancient granite for rising abruptly 230 feet above the Indian Ocean beyond the strip of east coast beach, man-made infrastructure is discreetly concealed behind vegetation. Spacious guest villas, just a few languid steps from the powdery beach, are designed and furnished to create an inviting home-away-from-home experience complete with modern luxuries such as Ligne St. Barth amenities, satellite televisions, DVD players, and iPod docks.

All four luxurious villas, extensively refurbished in 2008 by acclaimed South African design company Design Crew, are strategically located to maximize privacy while capitalizing on dreamy ocean views. Designed in French Colonial style to commemorate the region’s heritage and reflect traditional design, villa amenities ensure maximum guest comfort while limiting human impact on the island. Perfect for couples, families, or groups of friends wanting an intimate, secluded experience, an exclusive rental of Cousine Island resort is a luxurious way to find out if tropical island life lives up to its promise of an idyllic castaway experience. Accommodations, from an intimate dinner for two on the beach to a large gathering in one of the villas. "Guests have the opportunity to live among nature and to experience what the Seychelles would have been like a hundred years ago. By staying in the villas, guests directly contribute to the future of the island and conservation work being done here," she enthuses. All funds raised by the Cousine Island Trust are used to run the island and its conservation program. Adopting a holistic philosophy to conserve rather than construct, wildlife is as welcome on the island as is human life, with the island offering some of the most intimate nature encounters available in the Seychelles. Management has taken an active approach to protecting and preserving endangered species, creating an important natural habitat in its truest form.

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