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# A drop in the Indian Ocean

*A taste of paradise can be found in sacred Sri Lanka, the white sands of the Seychelles, or on the magical island of Mauritius* By Charlotte Flach

82 C&IT SUMMER 2018

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## SRI LANKA

After landing at Colombo International Airport (Bandaranaike International Airport), a short 40-minute drive takes you to Colombo's most prestigious address: One Galle Face. The Shangri-La Colombo sits along a beautiful beachfront, just minutes from the Central Business District, which includes the World Trade Centre, the National Exhibition Centre, government offices and diplomatic missions.

Host an event of epic proportions in the Grand Ballroom, which can accommodate up to 2,500 guests theatre-style. Or bask in the almost year-round sunshine on a turfed outdoor events space located on the fourth floor, with a pavilion

suspended over an oriental-inspired water feature. All fresco dining is available for 420, or host cocktails for 750 revellers.

Choose the nearby Ministry of Crab in the old Dutch Hospital for a fun and casual evening meal on the first night. Let delegates get stuck in with their fingers to a range of crabs, varying in size from tiny critters to gargantuan beasts. The branded bibs are optional, but definitely recommended.

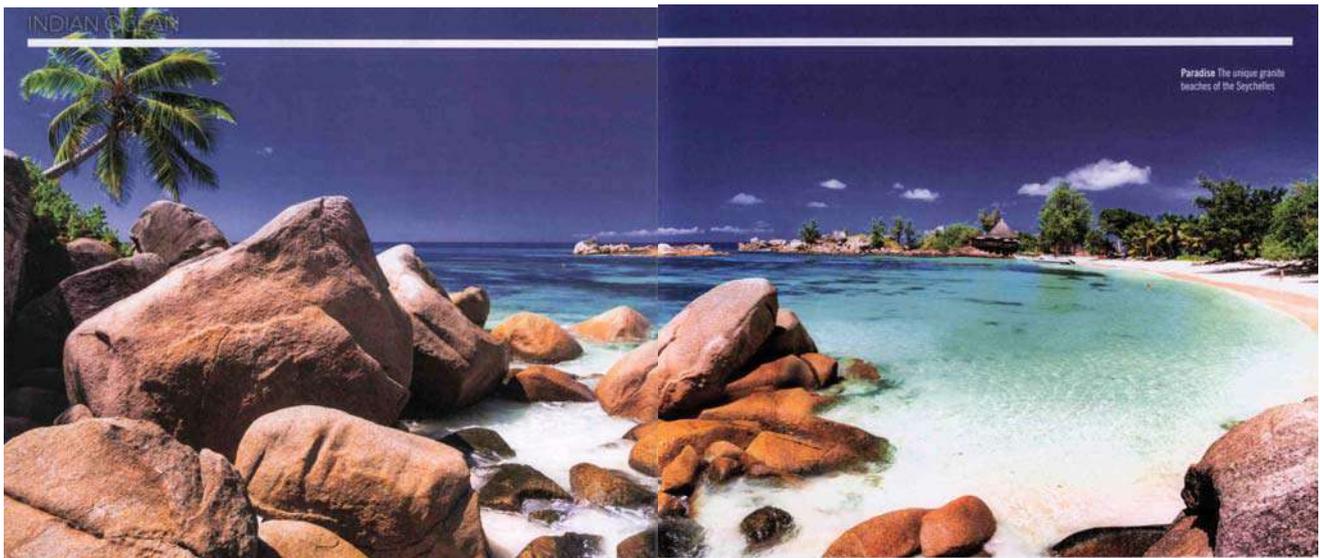
Start day two with a thrilling ride around the capital city with Tuk Tuk Safari, as you whizz between attractions including traditional temples, iconic landmarks and breathtaking beachfronts. Visit the Gangaramaya Buddhist Temple, where a Bo sapling – taken from the Great Bodhi tree under

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SUMMER 2018 C&IT 83



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## INDIAN OCEAN

which the Buddha attained enlightenment – has intertwined with the temple structure.

The whistlestop tour offers plenty of Instagrammable opportunities across the sprawling metropolis, all from the comfort of your personal ride. The tour ends at street-food restaurant The Curry Pot, where curries and rice are served on a palm leaf.

If you have tea enthusiasts in your group, a day trip to the Virgin White Tea Estate is essential. This tea is famed across the world for its unique history and delightful flavour. Many years ago the tea was cut with golden scissors by virgins, who were the only pickers allowed to touch the sacred plants. Hear about the plantation's history from an expert guide, meet the tea-pickers, witness the tea-making process first hand and purchase your own boxes of white tea. Then stay overnight at the nearby Shangri-La Hambantota Resort, making sure to visit its unique artisan village, filled with arts and crafts made by locals.

### SEYCHELLES

Take a step back from reality at Eden Bleu Hotel on the stunning man-made Eden Island, off the coast of Mahe. The beautiful international marina and mountains surround the complex made up of the main hotel and the private villas. This vista is the perfect backdrop for a day of meetings in the executive boardroom for between six and 14 people or a gala dinner in the ballroom for 250 delegates.

The boardwalk, which runs from outside the hotel to nearby Eden Plaza, is home to Bourgeois Bar, but there are many other food and beverage outlets all in walking distance for delegate downtime.

If any of your guests fancy themselves as nautical wayfarers, test their sea legs with a game-fishing expedition. Once back on dry land, the Marlin Bleu restaurant at the hotel can rustle up a creole BBQ with any spoils from the trip as diners enjoy the sunset over the pool and tuck into a selection of meats, including their catch of the day.

This is also the perfect base for island hopping. Take a short trip on the ferry to Praslin, where you can trek through the lush winding forest paths of Valée de Mai Nature Reserve. Home to the famous coco de mer tree and rare black parrot, the site is thought by some to be the original Garden of Eden.

Journey to La Digue to take a leisurely bike ride through the picturesque roads of the island to reach Anse Source d'Argent, allegedly the most photographed beach in the world with its distinctive rocks and pure white sand. Then on your way back to the ferry, stop off at Fish Trap Restaurant & Bar to



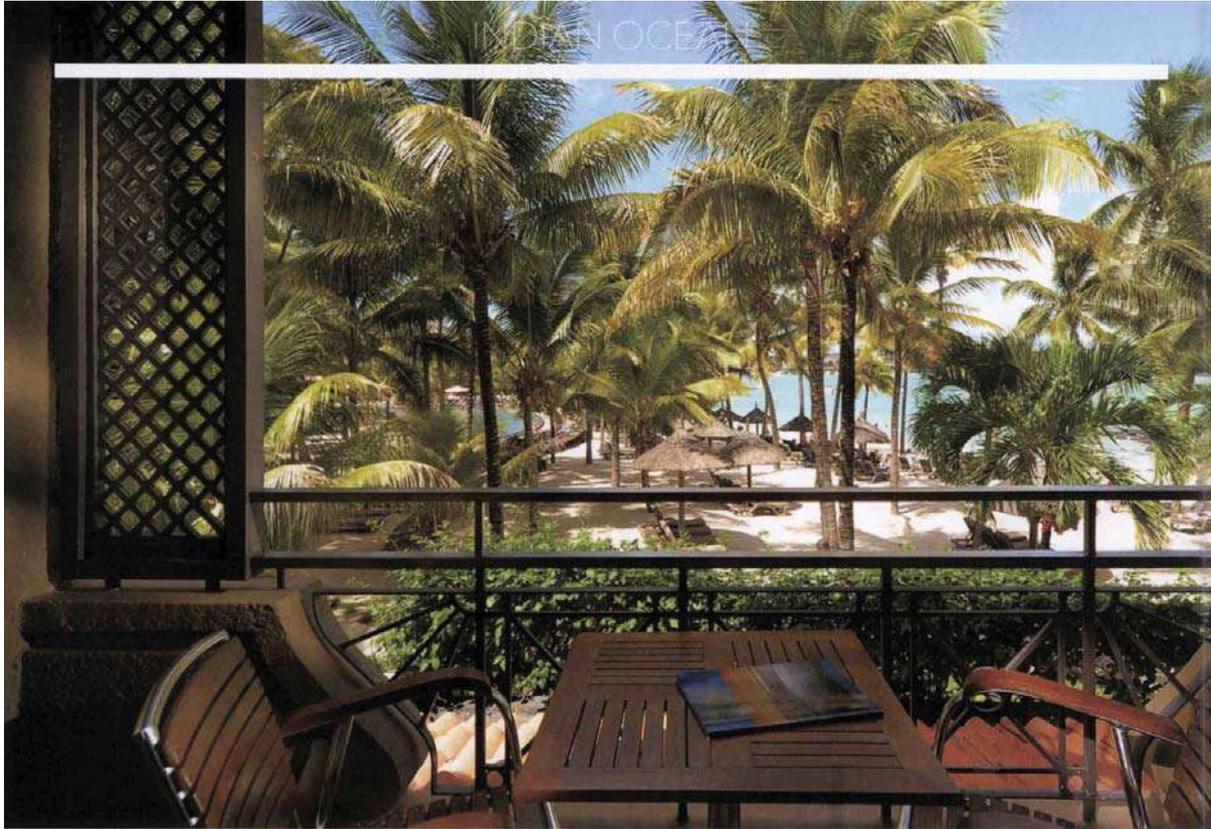
**Buddha awaits** Gangaramaya Temple, Colombo, above

**Beautiful location** The Shangri-La, Colombo, right



**Step back from reality** Eden Bleu Hotel, Eden Island, below





enjoy fresh seafood and cocktails, right on the beachfront.

Finish off your trip with a visit to the capital of Victoria on the main island of Mahe. Don't miss out on the main feature, 'Little Ben' – a smaller replica of the London landmark – and a market selling local souvenirs, including handcrafted wood turtles.

## MAURITIUS

Touchdown on the stunning island of Mauritius, known for its biodiversity with an abundance of flora and fauna. Stay at the Mauricia Beachcomber Resort and Spa, with 283 rooms, 143 of them sea-facing, giving awe-inspiring views over the Indian Ocean. Located in the centre of Grand Baie, nightlife and shopping districts are within walking distance and an onsite nightclub means delegates can take full advantage of the all-inclusive drinks package.

Meet in one of the hotel's two fully air-conditioned conference rooms, with space for either 60 or 30 theatre-style. Then afterwards, host a themed dinner at the hotel, with an Indian evening celebrating the island's majority-Hindu culture for 60 to 200 guests.

**Awe-inspiring views** Mauricia Beachcomber Resort and Spa, Mauritius

A footpath leads guests to the heart of an Indian city, recreated on the beach, with cocktails served in coconuts and local party food served on arrival. Colourful sarees adorn tables and buffet areas, and Indian dances are performed throughout the evening.

