

## Despite \$8 million in COVID-tourism losses, Blue Safari Seychelles continues conservations programmes

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Despite financial difficulties, Blue Safari Seychelles in partnership with Island Conservation Society and Islands Development Company is continuing to run programmes to protect ecosystems on four of Seychelles' outer islands. (Brian Chakanyuka/Blue Safari Seychelles)

Blue Safari Seychelles in partnership with **Island Conservation Society (ICS)** and **Islands Development Company (IDC)** is continuing to run programmes to protect ecosystems on four of Seychelles' outer islands despite huge financial difficulties due to a reduction in tourism arrivals because of COVID-19.

Blue Safari Seychelles is a concept introduced in the island nation in 2018 which offers a first-hand discovery of Astove, Cosmoledo, Amirantes, and Alphonse – four of Seychelles' atolls -- through experiential travel. Through its activities, the company engages visitors in

conservation activities, getting them involved in contributing to the protection of these islands' ecosystems.

From March to December last year the company welcomed 224 tourists to the islands compared to 905 in 2019 for the same period. Visitors to the four outer islands have to pay \$25 a day as a conservation charge to fund projects.



Blue Safari Seychelles offers a first-hand discovery of Astove, Cosmoledo, Amirantes, and Alphonse – four of Seychelles' atolls -- through experiential travel. (Seychelles Tourism Board) Photo License: [CC-BY](#)

The chief executive of Blue Safari, renowned fly-fishing expert Keith Rose-Innes, told SNA that despite the fact that actual and potential revenue loss has just exceeded \$8 million due to a steep drop in visitors over the last year, it is important for projects to keep running as a gap in information could potentially skew projects' results.

"We have the ability to continue all our projects through sound financial planning by building an endowment fund within the Alphonse Foundation. We would rather cut other budgets to continue the conservation work we are doing as it's a vital part of our company ethos, which is why we won't get involved in a destination unless we can improve conservation and responsibility and protect the environment," said Innes.

He added that "the Alphonse Foundation has approximately \$900,000 saved in its endowment fund, whereas the Cosmoledo and Astove Foundation is new and has not had a chance to start an endowment fund. It has however raised enough funds to start the monitoring projects on Astove and Cosmoledo."

Innes said the purpose of the fund is to be able to fund the conservation work in perpetuity if the revenue from tourism ceased at some point in the future.

"The levy goes into the Alphonse, Cosmoledo, Astove, or Farquhar Foundation among others which funds the **Island Conservation Society (ICS)** team, conservation centre and core projects of the island group," continued Innes.



One Such project is the long-term monitoring of turtle nesting activity in the Alphonse Group. (S.Balderson/Blue Safari Seychelles) Photo License: [All Rights Reserved](#)

ICS has been contracted to provide advice on conservation through long term monitoring of the terrestrial and marine ecology of the islands by **Islands Development Company (IDC)**, which manages 13 of the 72 outer islands of Seychelles, an archipelago in the western Indian Ocean.

"We directly partner with them on a number of projects helping to collect valuable data. One Such project is the long-term monitoring of turtle nesting activity in the Alphonse Group. It is an opportunity for guests to regularly see nesting Green and Hawksbill Turtles and hatchlings erupting from the beaches is once-in-a-lifetime and not something seen in places with a lot of human activity," said Elle Brighton, ecology and sustainability manager of the group.

Blue Safari also offers snorkelling with and photographing of manta rays, birdwatching walks, turtle patrols, scuba diving, tree planting, beach cleanups, and a scuba diving excursion to collect debris from the ocean.

"In addition to the activities, guests also have the opportunities to go on expeditions with the on-island Marine Ecologist looking for our resident population of Reef Manta Rays. We are a key partner of the Seychelles Manta Ray Project with ICS and the Manta Trust which aims to

assess the population numbers, movement patterns and habitat ecology of this gentle giant," said Brighton.

The company also ensures that it is as sustainable as possible in every aspect of its operations.

She said that Alphonse is powered by "the largest solar plant in the Seychelles, providing around 89 percent of our energy demand which has saved 250,000 litres of diesel from being burnt every year since it was installed."

The main swimming pool and the laundry use harvested rainwater, whereas more than 65 percent of fresh produce consumed on the island comes from Blue Safari's vegetable garden and all food waste and VegWare disposables are composted which then goes back into the ground.

"We are strongly against disposable plastic and try to eliminate as much of this as possible. PET plastic bottles are not brought to the island, reusable YETI flasks are provided for guest use, we only serve paper straws, we use VegWare cling wrap and sanitary gloves. We try to use as little harmful chemicals as possible and have PACE Seychelles biodegradable cleaning products with refillable dispensaries to remove single-use plastic," she added.