



Meet Jean-Claude Camille, ranger for the Island Conservation Society on Desroches Island



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Finding his true calling after a series of jobs that included being a cook and carpenter, Jean-Claude Camille is a Senior Conservation Ranger with the Island Conservation Society of Desroches Island in Seychelles, an organization that aims to sensitize the local community and tourists to the protection and preservation of the local flora and fauna. Starting out as a volunteer more than a decade ago, today Jean-Claude is in charge of data collection for the ICS and works closely with the Four Seasons Resort on Desroches Island, conceptualizing various activities along the way. We sit down with him to learn more about this incredible island and his life here.

Meet Jean-Claude Camille



GLH: Hello Jean-Claude. Thank you so much for taking the time to answer a few of our questions. For people who may not be familiar with your work, could you quickly introduce yourself?

Jean-Claude Camille: Hello. My name is Jean-Claude Camille and I am a Senior Conservation Ranger at the Island Conservation Society on Desroches Island. My work mostly focuses on the collection of data and training new team members who are sent to work at the conservation center.

GLH: As we understand, you've had many jobs before becoming a ranger for the ICS. Where did this passion for nature and the preservation of the local wildlife come from?

Jean-Claude Camille: Indeed, I have had many jobs before I became a Senior Ranger. I was a cook, mason and a head painter at another island resort. My passion for the conservation of nature came when I was working on D'Arros Island as a painter. I was inspired by Jeanne Mortimer, a scientist and turtle specialist, who was also an ICS trustee and looking for volunteers to assist with the conservation work on the island.



At the time, there was a lot of poaching happening, across the islands of Seychelles. I quickly developed a passion for conservation and became so engrossed by the work that I was a volunteer for 11 years. I was the first person on the outer island to mount an exhibition to sensitize people against turtle poaching. People were always puzzled as to why I was collecting data and patrolling the beaches, so I initiated an exhibition in 2002. It created the awareness I was aiming for. I put together a lot of information and a lot of photos to show them why we are trying to protect the species on D'Arros Island. Media houses covered the exhibition, which gave it a bigger exposure as well. I was very proud of the work I had done, because from this exhibition emerged a greater sense of respect for other species.

Then I moved to Silhouette Island to work as a head painter in 2014 and I joined the Island Conservation team as a volunteer and soon enough became a ranger.

GLH: Can you tell us what a Senior Conservation Ranger at the Island Conservation Society does exactly and how often do you collaborate with the Four Seasons resort on the island?

Jean-Claude Camille: We collaborate with the Four Seasons Resort Seychelles at Desroches Island on a daily basis really. Four Seasons and ICS work hand in hand for the conservation and protection of the species and sustainability of the island. We engage in daily and weekly activities with the hotels so that guests can be part of the conservation efforts. We do presentations and we cater for guided tours whereby the resort guests can learn about the flora and fauna of the different islands, experience the wildlife, and even plant a tree or adopt a tortoise with the Tortoise Adoption Program. Additionally, we have a night time guided tour whereby guests are able to come along on the turtle patrols that the staff do at night as part of the monitoring process. They can even adopt a sea turtle if they spot one.



Due to the pandemic, a number of our conservation initiatives have been temporarily put on hold, but we have developed other ways to sensitize guests and the local community about the preservation, and a great example of this is our monthly beach clean-up and guests are invited to join.

GLH: According to you, is it important to combine the world of luxury hotels and the concept of sustainability? Do you think that tourists have a role to play in the preservation of biodiversity?

Jean-Claude Camille: Seychelles and its luxury properties can't survive without a collaborative partnership. The two must work side by side. In truth, conservation has little to do with tourism, but resort guests serve as a reminder that we need to keep the islands intact. When they appreciate the work we do, or when they get to be in awe of the species, the flora and fauna, it makes it worth it. It gives an extra bonus to the sustainability goals of the islands. Resort clients often jump in with us for beach clean-ups and that is pretty amazing.

GLH: What are some of the activities that you organize for the guests of the Four Seasons resort?

Jean-Claude Camille: ICS has activities to engage resort guests in conservation work. On most occasions, guests will support the ICS's conservation work with monetary donations, which is really great. But I also like educational activities, like the "coconut education activity" I initiated a few years ago and where guests explore all that could be done with the tropical coconut tree. I showed guests that every part of the fruit -the husk, the tree itself- could be used and nothing is thrown away and it was something that guests really loved.

GLH: If you were to recommend only one educational activity on Desroches Island, what would it be?

Jean-Claude Camille: I would recommend the guided tour along the beach. There is no better way to learn about Desroches Island than to meet the creatures along the beach – to see the turtles and their breeding grounds and the many wondrous creatures of nature in their natural habitat. The turtles, small sharks and sea animals are not afraid of visitors, and for me, this is an amazing moment worth experiencing in one's lifetime.



GLH: We heard that Desroches Island is your favorite of all the islands of the Seychelles. Why is that?

Jean-Claude Camille: I don't want to ever leave my island. I am the first to walk on the beach in the morning and the last at night. I need to see what is new from the last walk or patrol the day before. Of course, I need helping hands as I cannot do it all alone. I have lived on a few islands but Desroches is magnificent. Every day is just more beautiful than the previous one.

GLH: Why do you think travelers should come here?

Jean-Claude Camille: Desroches is too beautiful an island to miss out, and it has a lot to offer. We don't have as many birds as the other islands, but there is enough variety of birds to explore. The marine biodiversity is incredible. The beaches and life underwater will make the trip worth it. I have been on Desroches for a while now and I am still mesmerized every single day.

GLH: If you had to describe a perfect day on the island, what would it be like?

Jean-Claude Camille: For me, a perfect day is waking up early in the morning, grabbing my GPS, pencil and board, and patrol along my favorite beach. And then I walk back to the office to write down what I observed. The precious findings of what was not there the day before and the assurance that the conservation work is going well. I believe that a good day of work has ended when I go back home, and sit down to have a hot cup of tea with my wife, Laurette.