



**D**aybreak over the Indian Ocean. On a silver white beach, two periscopic eyes peer out of a burrow, scanning for danger. Encouraged by the tranquillity, a ghost crab scuttles to the shoreline, embossing the glistening sand with minute prints. A Spotted Eagle Ray leaps from the water and belly flops to the surface with a gentle splash. Waves lap on the shore. Otherwise, the beach is serene and deserted: no voices, no footprints. This is a typical Desroches dawn: the sun reveals an island beach scene unchanged for millennia, but today this is the backdrop for dramatic revitalisation and invigoration of the island, on two fronts: conservation and accommodation, for the first time working in tandem to make Desroches a very special place for visitors.

Desroches is the largest island in the Amirantes, separated from its neighbours by a channel of deep water. It is a sand cay on the western edge of a submerged atoll about 20 kilometres in diameter. A deep strait northwest of the island enables large vessels – even cruise ships – to enter the lagoon safely. The outer reef slopes are characterised by multiple caverns, tunnels and sinkholes, many of which are popular dive sites. At one time, the island was shown on English charts as Wood Island due to the extensive native forest, but in the late 18th Century the French named it Desroches in honour of Francois Julien Desroches, administrator of Ile de France (now Mauritius) and Bourbon (now Reunion).

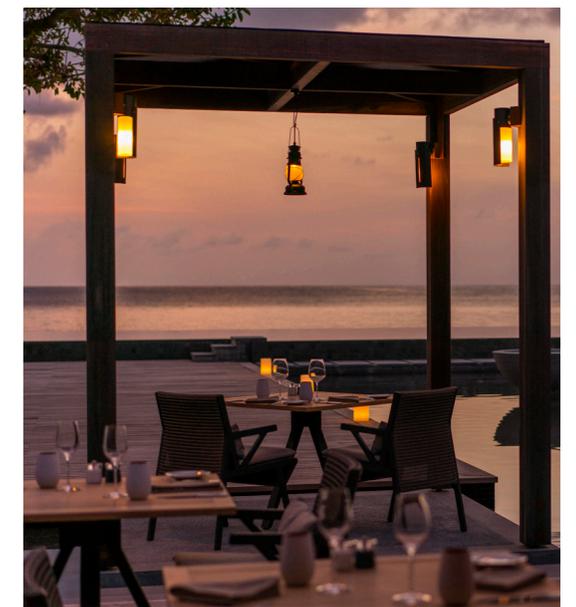
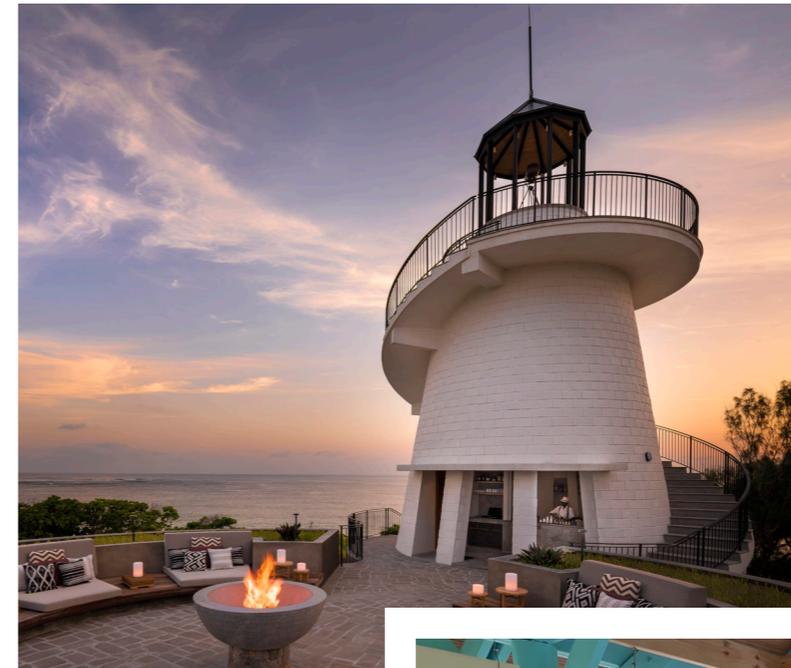
Following more than a century of exploitation for timber and copra production, Desroches was the first outer island to welcome modern tourism. The first hotel opened as far back as 1987, but after several refurbishments it closed in

2016 for complete remodelling. In early 2018, a new hotel opened: the 5-star Four Seasons Resort, with 71 high quality accommodations including bungalows, villas, suites and residences – each with personal pool, beach access and a verdant, private garden.

One of the striking features of this renaissance of tourism on Desroches is the innovative Discovery Centre situated between the main resort and the airstrip. This building is a testament to the importance of the principals of ecotourism, to the recent development of visitor accommodation on Desroches. The open-air structure contains large hanging display boards and is a unique celebration of the little known history and natural history of the island and how Desroches fits into the wider story of Seychelles' conservation. Informative text, produced mainly by experts from Island Conservation Society, accompanies high-resolution images, maps and diagrams that inform, entertain and educate.

The Discovery Centre is also the base for the Wise Oceans' resident Marine Educator, who introduces Four Seasons guests to the aquatic wonders of Desroches. Guests may accompany WiseOceans on snorkelling excursions in the lagoon. This is a great opportunity to see colourful reef life, including butterflyfish, surgeonfish, angelfish, rays, corals and even turtles feeding in the seagrass beds around the island.

The hotel has several dining venues, including the Claudine Restaurant offering all-day dining and the Deli or the Bar for a snack or drink. The signature restaurant is The Lighthouse, a striking and charismatic structure perched at the edge of a promontory. Here you dine to the accompaniment of waves



washing on the shore and – at certain times of year – the eerie cries of the shearwaters that nest in burrows nearby. Halfway up the lighthouse is an outdoor bar, a great place for a sundown drink.

Nearby, the Circle of Connection Spa offers everything you would expect from a top class facility, from pampering body care to salon treatments, but with the added bonus of a magical location. "Desroches is such an incredible destination," says Sandie Johnnessen, Senior Spa Director. "The purity of the nature, the untouched beauty of the island and the surrounding ocean, and the tranquillity of its remoteness, all combine to create a setting that feels naturally rejuvenating".

At one time, the emphasis of human activity at Desroches was solely on the exploitation of its resources. Casuarina trees and coconut palms replaced native vegetation; rats and cats were introduced, and as a result breeding seabirds vanished. Today, Desroches is entering a new phase in its human history, with a strong emphasis on conservation efforts supported by



sustainable tourism and the rewards are beginning to be realised. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters are nesting once more at Desroches whilst the smaller Tropical Shearwaters has recently been recorded breeding for the first time in at least a century, probably due to successful control of rats. Two species of turtles, Hawksbill and Green Turtle, are returning to breed in increasing numbers. Native trees are taking root. Serious conservation work began in 2008, when Desroches Foundation was registered as a new partnership bringing together tourism investors on Desroches, Islands Development Company (IDC), the Ministry of

Environment and Island Conservation Society (ICS), a leading local nature conservation NGO active in the outer islands. This foundation partnership has been heralded internationally as a model for the future, bringing together diverse interests who share a common goal: the protection and enhancement of Desroches, financed by ecotourism. ICS implement conservation, monitoring and rehabilitation projects funded by contributions from IDC, from Four Seasons and from guests of the resort. The environment has been given an economic value so that protecting its future gives much greater returns than the exploitation of it for short-term gain.



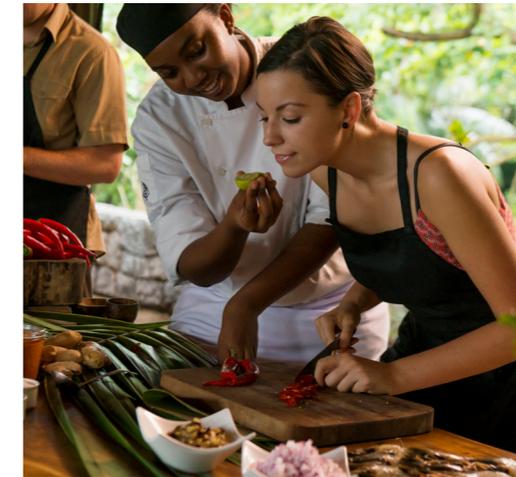
Desroches is also famous for game fishing. Just offshore, within easy reach by fast boats, the edge of the Amirantes Bank provides some of the best fishing grounds in the world.



ICS employ a full-time Conservation Officer and other conservation staff. Every visitor to the island is invited to call in to the Island Conservation Centre in the village to meet the staff, learn more about their work first-hand and visit the nearby Aldabra Giant Tortoise sanctuary.

Getting around Desroches on foot is very easy, with well-kept pathways running parallel to the shoreline. However, to make it easier to reach the village, the conservation centre or the old lighthouse at the opposite end of the island to the hotel, bicycles are provided for visitors.

Many guests come to Desroches not to relax, but to experience one of the finest locations in the Indian Ocean for scuba diving and other watersports. The calm waters of the Desroches lagoon are ideal for boating and kayaking. The Castaway Centre, located next to the resort, is fully equipped with top of the range BCDs, regulators, wetsuits and other necessary equipment. The centre takes divers to some outstanding dive sites, none of which is more than 20 minutes from the island. There are calm sheltered sites suitable for beginners and more challenging locations for the experienced diver. Undoubtedly the most thrilling is the Desroches Drop on the rim of the atoll, where the outer reef falls steeply to tremendous depths. Wherever sunlight penetrates, Gorgonian sea fans cling to the subterranean cliffs but the most fascinating submarine features are a series of long, wide caves that burrow into the steep walls of the atoll.



Desroches is also famous for game fishing. Just offshore, within easy reach by fast boats, the edge of the Amirantes Bank provides some of the best fishing grounds in the world, where sailfish, tuna, bonito, dorado, kingfish and other much sought-after fish can be found. In between the excitement of landing your catch, a fishing trip is also an excellent opportunity to see dolphins and occasionally humpback whales in the deep offshore waters.

Back ashore, there are four land bird species on Desroches, all of which were introduced by early settlers. House Sparrows probably arrived accidentally during

the plantation days, while Barred Ground Doves may have been deliberately brought in for their endearing, trusting nature. A flash of red in the woodland indicates a male Madagascar Fody, an endemic bird elsewhere in the Indian Ocean but a non-native here. Grey Francolin were introduced around 1875 to provide sport for plantation managers and occasional VIP visitors from the main islands. Once these game birds were common on many of the outer islands but today they only survive here and on Coëtivy.

Small parties of migratory birds, mainly shorebirds, which have somehow found their way across the Indian Ocean to spend the winter on this speck of land, may be seen on the grassy margins of the airstrip. Occasionally, rarities appear, such as Amur Falcons from northeast Asia and colourful Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters.

This may be the closest of the outer islands to the main islands of Seychelles, but it might as well be a world away. There is no traffic – not even a surfaced road – no pollution, and best of all, few sounds that do not come from the natural world. Away from the resort or the village all you will hear are the waves gently hissing on the shore, the wind in the casuarinas, and the cries of birds. The hope for the future is that that the two most dramatic changes of recent years – in the quality of guest accommodation and the new emphasis upon conservation – have successfully combined to preserve Desroches as one of the finest tropical island ecotourism destinations in the world.