

# pleasure beach

Strands that deliver. Kate O'Donnell goes beachcombing

Forget Shakespeare – a glorious golden beach fringed with swaying palms is the stuff that dreams are made on when winter weather threatens to overwhelm us. Although it's perfectly possible to find beautiful beaches close to home, the truth is that at this time of year you need to fly to be sure of sun. But a little jetlag is worth it for such therapeutic results. We round up 20 top destinations worldwide where you can step straight from your hotel room into paradise.

## AFRICA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

Seychellois beaches have all the components of the ideal desert island: sand as fine as talcum powder, palm trees that obligingly drop coconuts on to the sand (perfect for instant liquid refreshment) and gentle surf rhythmically swooshing. The most beautiful beaches are at **Frégate Island Private** (Seasons in Style, 0151 342 0505), an exclusive island 15 minutes by light aircraft from Mahé. The seven white coral-sand beaches here are small, intimate (Anse Victorin is the loveliest) and the stuff of Robinson Crusoe fantasy.

Thanks to their remoteness, the Maldives have immaculate beaches. Compared with the Caribbean or Far East, there's not much to do, but that's the point. The hippest resorts are all about going back to nature

amid twenty-first-century luxury. An example? At the idyllic **Four Seasons Resort Maldives** at Kuda Huraa (Elegant Resorts, 0870 3333380) the most desirable suites are set just back from the pristine beach and buried in lush tropical vegetation. Equally beautiful is **Soneva Fushi** (Scott Dunn World, 020 8672 1234) on Kunfunadhoo Island in the Baa Atoll – a tiny white-sand haven where you can have a massage on the beach to the sound of lapping waves.

Mauritian beaches are the most cosseted in the world. Top hotels rake theirs daily, the better to enhance their guests' comfort. The most elegant strips of sand surround the stylish **Saint Géran** (Classic Connection Indian Ocean, 01244 355320) on Mauritius' smart east coast. The nearby **Le Toussierok** (Worldwide Journeys & Expeditions, 020 7386 4646) is like a rambling Mediterranean village and has a dozen white-sand beaches – the uninhabited Ilot Mangénie is ideal for would-be castaways.

The ultimate barefoot paradise off Africa is **Mnemba Island Lodge** (Abercrombie & Kent, 0845 0700611), a tiny coral island a short boat ride from Zanzibar. The 10 thatched cottages have verandahs overlooking the sea and life revolves around the perfect beaches. Even dinner is eaten under the stars on the sand. >

