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# Home and Away

Whether you go near or far, any travel experience can be downright transporting.

## SEASHELLS, SEYCHELLES

Where are we? Here are some hints: An archipelago of 115 islands about two and a half times the size of Washington, DC. It's in the Indian Ocean, northeast of Madagascar, and has been alternately ruled by France and Great Britain. In 1976, while we Americans were boozing it up for our bicentennial, this lovely little country was celebrating its own independence. Besides English and French, Creole is also spoken.

If you guessed the Seychelles, you would be correct. But few people, at least in the United States, seem to know about this haven. The Seychelles are made up of two types of islands—granitic and low limestone. The latter are smaller and almost entirely flat; most have no water and are largely uninhabited. The granitic islands, on the other hand, are mountainous and lush. (Take Mahé, the main island that you fly to, as an example.) And since the government actually cares about the environment, building is limited, which means that if you go in five years chances are you'll see just as many palm, coconut, banana, mango, and breadfruit trees as you do today.

The Seychelles are renowned for their flora, and the Seychellois (as the locals are called) are especially proud of the coco-de-mer palm, found only in the Vallée de Mai on Praslin Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This palm births the largest nuts in the world, which happen to be shaped like a woman's pelvis. Legend has it that when General Gordon (whoever *that* was) visited the valley more than 100 years ago, he thought he'd discovered the Garden of Eden. What gave him that idea? The feminine-shaped nut, which reminded him of Eve.

While there are a number of luxurious, hedonistic resorts in the Seychelles, one of our favorites is the Banyan Tree, on Intendance Bay on Mahé. Rumor has it that Paul McCartney and Heather Mills—pre-trial separation, natch—honeymooned in the Presidential Suite. Jennifer Connelly *et famille* reportedly stayed here while she was shooting a film in the 'hood. So did Leo DiCaprio. So on, so forth.

## BUT IT'S GOING TO LA COSTA YOU

It was one of the first and finest destination spas around, but now it's a whole new ball game, as La Costa, the 545-room, 400-acre Spanish Colonial resort, houses a newly renovated spa, the exclusive Chopra Center, and celebrity stylist Billy Yamaguchi's salon—a place that will translate your style into an elevated sense of personal power and beauty. Following a Abhyanga rhythmic oil massage and guided Deepak Chopra visualization at the Chopra Center, grab an integrated medical consultation with Dr. David Simon to discuss health concerns from both a physical and a spiritual perspective. Next stop is the Spa at La Costa with its tumbling Romanesque waterfall, 15,000-square-foot outdoor courtyard, private VIP suites, and complimentary Agua de la Vida bathing ritual, plus Champagne and fresh Carlsbad strawberries, which pair perfectly with a Spanish herbal bath of fresh sage, lavender, and rosemary oil. If you can't stop coming back for more, become a member of the Club at La Costa and take advantage of two championship golf courses, tennis on any of the 19 clay and hard courts, unlimited access to the state-of-the-art athletic club, and the all-new spa year-round. La Costa

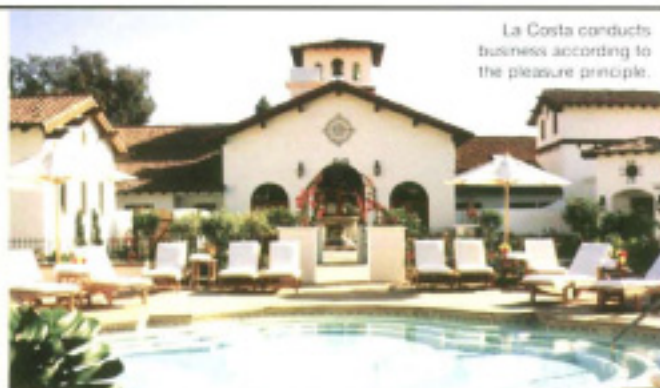


If you can't relax at Banyan Tree, there's no hope. Below: A charming view.



Each of the Banyan Tree's 47 villas has its own pool overlooking the Indian Ocean—some located right on the beach, others perched in the hills. The food is terrific, with Thai and Southeast Asian fare at Saffron and Creole cuisine at Au Jardin d'Épices. The spa is divine; we're especially partial to the Hawaiian Lomi Lomi—a deep massage involving pineapple and coconut scrub and tropical fruit conditioners to moisturize the skin.

While the resort has a white-sand beach and an infinity pool that seems to melt straight into the ocean (not to mention the in-villa pools), you should get out and explore the islands. For tours, snorkeling and scuba excursions, and general good times, enlist Creole Travel Services (011-248-280-100). Ask for Guillaume, the charming native who helps run the company owned by his father. Trust us—we've never been so relaxed. *Doubles from \$1,335. Banyan Tree Seychelles, Anse Intendance, Mahé, Republic of Seychelles, 800-745-8883; banyantree.com.* —ABBY ELLIN



La Costa conducts business according to the pleasure principle.

even offers a daily kids and teens club, and access to three pools and two signature restaurants for those with some family in tow. *Rooms from \$325 to \$3,500. The La Costa Resort and Spa, 2100 Costa del Mar Road, Carlsbad, 800-854-5000; lacosta.com.* ★ —LAYLA REVIS