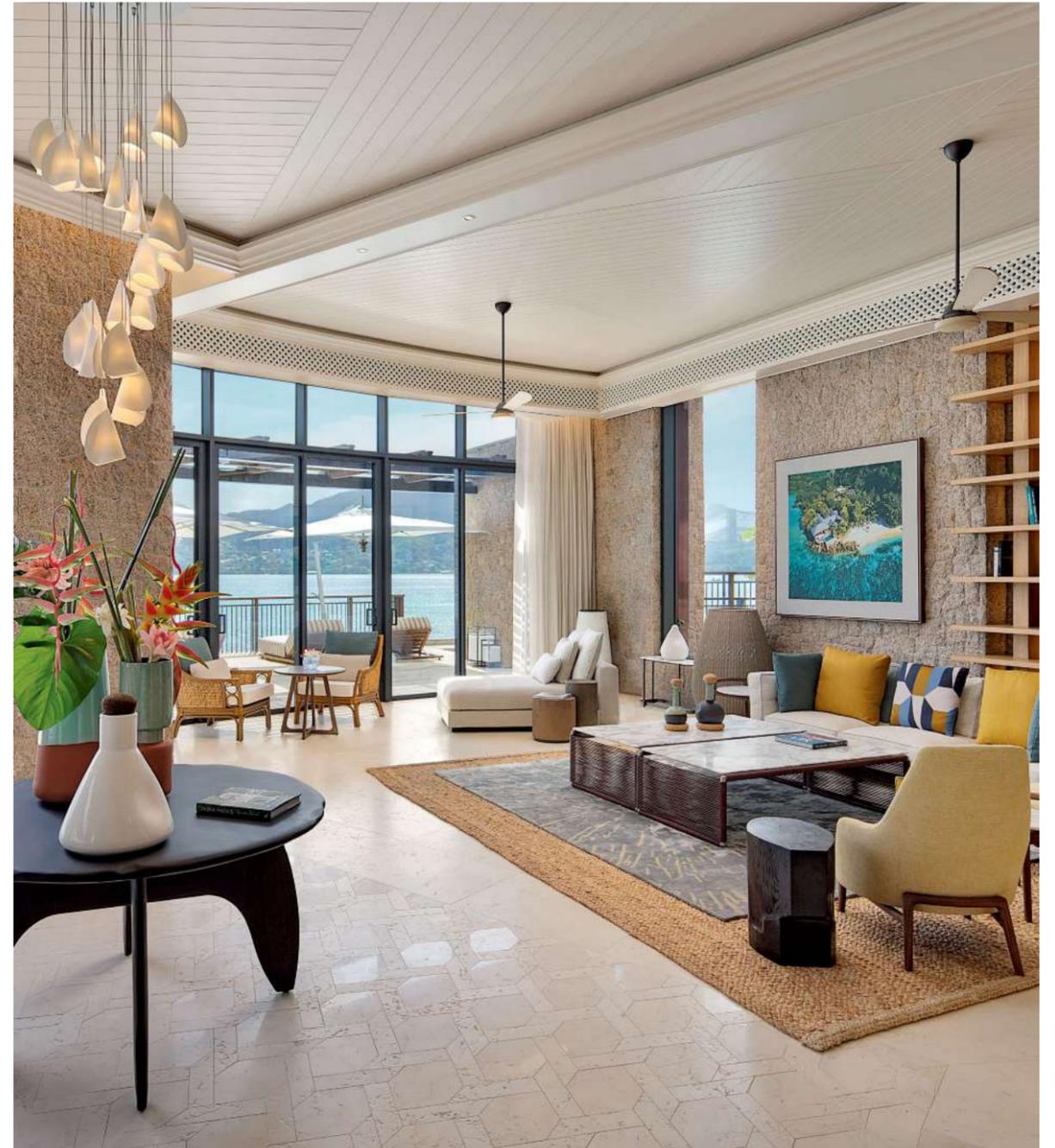


# WHERE TO STAY

SEYCHELLES | RAJASTHAN | LONDON



## FIRST IN: MANGO HOUSE, SEYCHELLES

The former home of an Italian photographer has been transformed into a chic beachfront boutique hotel, and **Isabella Sullivan** was the first to soak up its renewed sheen



It was a shoot for *Vogue Paris* that first brought Italian photographer Gian Paolo Barbieri to the East African archipelago of Seychelles in 1975. He loved it so much that he purchased a slick of land on the shores of Anse Aux Poules Bleues, a pale blue bay on the wild southwest coast of Mahé. There's an ethereal dazzle to the bay: watercolour cerulean skies melt into white sands and inky blue swells, framed by granitic boulders weathered by wind and water. The only sound comes from waves crashing onto untrammelled beaches, and the ritual squawking of fruit bats at dusk coming to feast on the property's mangoes. It's this abundance of mango trees that inspired Barbieri to dub his new bolthole Mango House.

Decades later, the hideaway was acquired by LXR, Hilton's luxury lifestyle arm focused on forging intimate local connections. The brand went about transforming it into a luxury boutique hotel, leaving locals all aflutter as it built relationships with area artisans: neighbour Alyssa Adams designed the hotel's signature print, and ceramicist Zara Albert created the Seychellois-inspired holders for lotions and potions. The result was a 41-room hotel strung along the shores of Anse Aux Poules Bleues, holding a deep affinity with the community and preserving Barbieri's affectionate moniker.

The old house still partially remains, forming the bones for the hotel's swish main structure, now home to a spa and four dining

outlets, with five globally-inspired venues – an impressive range, considering the intimate room count. Italian Muse is headed up by a Neapolitan chef, his pizzas pillowy bites of la dolce vita. There's also Azido by Japanese sushi masters and Kokoye by a drinks maverick from Dubai's Waldorf Astoria DIFC. The latter takes inspiration from the history of the Spice Route; a cosy Indo-Seychellois bubble of palm-tree-printed wallpaper and wicker cabinets filled with golden liquids. Guests can sample Creole at the alfresco Moutya, where fresh seafood is grilled over sustainable coconut-shell charcoal, and try Barbieri's local boiled "blue eggs" and dipping soldiers at breakfast.

All are overseen by the watchful eye of executive chef Olivier Barré, who, born in Réunion, returned to the Indian Ocean after working at Cheval Blanc and Paris' Joël Robuchon. Indian Ocean blood pumps through the property's veins: most of the staff hail from the islands, and their pearly smiles and warm-hearted chatter are undeniably infectious. One evening, after suffering a case of sunburn, we returned to our room to find a basket of soothing coconut creams lying unassumingly to the side. A kind staffer had spotted our rosy state and was keen to help.

For an even more soothing solution there's the Anpe spa (meaning "at peace" in Creole), where coconut, lemongrass and bigards (bitter oranges) are infused into calming massage oils. Local treatments are best had after an afternoon of non-

## FOR A SECOND YOU IMAGINE YOU ARE INDEED IN A PRIVATE HOME – THAT IS, UNTIL ANOTHER GUEST FLOPS DOWN BESIDE YOU

motorised watersports in the bay, with paddleboarding, kayaking and snorkelling all available for guests to enjoy. Mango House's pint-sized beach means it's not your quintessential luxury island resort, but it's certainly not trying to be.

The hotel actively encourages exertions beyond the property, with an unofficial motto of "welcome home." Naturally, you can't be welcomed home unless you leave, but there's plenty to explore nearby. Just a stroll down the drive leads you to Michael Adams MBE's art studio, housed in his traditional Seychellois home, one of the few on the island not destroyed by termites. Come for works by Michael, his daughter Alyssa and son Tristan, and, for those lucky enough, the chance to meet Michael in his studio, feverishly sketching away. Cap Lazare, home to the Albert family for decades, is also close, a 65-hectare nature reserve being reinvented as a dining and leisure destination.

It might seem almost paradoxical to conflate a global hotel company Hilton with the term "boutique," but in Mango House's case, they've managed to pull it off. Nowhere on the island feels quite as talked-about, as shiny, as intriguing, or with as much potential to make a big difference. Would Barbieri feel at home in this new Mango House? We think so. ☺

Rooms inspired by the Seychellois islands, with four-poster beds draped in billowing white cotton netting, scatterings of bamboo chairs and cabinets and bathrooms stocked with fruity salves that are locally made. Butter-soft kimonos – printed in kaleidoscopic Alyssa Adams designs – and two floppy hats and a Mango House beach bag hang on a hook. A clever form of guerrilla marketing, perhaps, as the hats make for perfect photo ops around the island. What's refreshing is that there are no bad rooms: all have ocean views and ample space for soaking bathtubs and large beds. Looking out from the two terraces of a beach house villa is like gazing at a painting: plumes of fluffy clouds float around granitic peaks like smoke, their slopes a jumble of traditional Creole houses in oranges, pinks, greens. Occasionally, the sun breaks from behind the clouds, capping the entire bay in gold.

These picture-perfect views of the wild southwest are intrinsic to life here, and just like the rooms, all of the dining experiences face the inky bay. Mango House goes big on

outlets. Despite their newness, creamy stone floors appear almost worn in, and are softened with woven jute rugs and plump cream sofas, chaises and bamboo-framed loungers strewn with green and blue cushions. On the wall, a bookshelf groaning with art and history tomes and a vinyl player, a copy of Elton John's *Diamonds* tossed jauntily beside it. But no place is the careful revamp more evident than the terrace, where Barbieri's original swimming pool is now a sleek infinity pool, lined with striped cream and beige loungers. For a second you imagine you are indeed in a private home – that is, until another guest flops down beside you.

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Opposite, clockwise from top left: Seychellois-inspired interiors; Bay House's three-bedroom pool villa; the soothing Anpe spa; all rooms have canopied four-poster beds. Previous pages: Pool at Ocean House; Gian Paolo Barbieri's original main house is the hub of the hotel