

TATTLER

Edited by FRANCISCA KELLETT

PLEASURE ISLAND

Kate Reardon and her new husband Charlie were hoping for luxurious solitude when they honeymooned on the Seychelles island of Frégate. But that was before they met the giant tortoises, wolf-whistling birds and curiously crunchy millipedes...



Ooh,
vertigo!

There is a beach on Frégate where the urge to immediately take off all your clothes is overwhelming. It is entirely private – you simply put the ‘Occupied’ sign up as you pass and it’s all yours. Be warned, though: the reality of leaping around naked in unforgiving midday sun does not quite live up to the fantasy. But get a good slick of seawater and suncream on your sunglasses and you look much more charming.

If you want to be alone – almost startlingly alone – come to Frégate. This private eco-luxe island is the size of Monaco but there are just 16 villas. During our eight-day honeymoon, my husband and I spotted only a handful of other guests, four times in total. I suspect we will never be quite so alone ever again.

Well, not entirely alone. Also there was our personal butler Sumith, who served meals, turned down the bed and tidied our room. So Charlie, Sumith and I had a lovely week together (although it was indubitably lovelier for Charlie and me than it was for Sumith).

The point of Frégate is not the human company. It’s the wildlife. It has a whiff of a five-star Jurassic Park about it, with its forests of ancient banyan trees and astonishingly successful rare-species breeding programme. There are more than 100 species of bird, including magpie robins (the seventh rarest bird in the world) and sweet fairy terns – and they don’t hold back from using the facilities: a duck-like one enjoyed taking energetic swims in our pool every morning. Proper laps. It occasionally got out to scratch its ear (water in it, I expect) with an improbably large yellow foot.

The soundtrack of Frégate is, unsurprisingly, birds. They circle above almost constantly, whistling at you like particularly impressed builders, which is good for the ego. At night all is quiet, except for sudden flurries of cackling, like the party is long over but a cheery group of stragglers are cracking open one last bottle of vodka.

As well as the birds, there are more than 2,000 giant tortoises (a population second only to that of the Galápagos Islands). They can weigh up to 900 pounds and make it to 150 years old. As you pootle around the island in your little golf cart, you see them wandering like aimless boulders. The resident ecologists let guests get as involved as they want, from helping rescue freshly hatched sea turtles to chatting about the Seychelles giant millipede – one of the largest millipedes in the world. They are surprisingly crunchy underfoot (but try not to squash too many – they’re a vulnerable species in every sense).

We went native quickly. I felt terrifically casual as I spotted another fat, shiny black millipede without screaming. I managed to say, ‘Ooh, look, a bat,’ as something as fat as a badger, hairy as a fox and sinister as

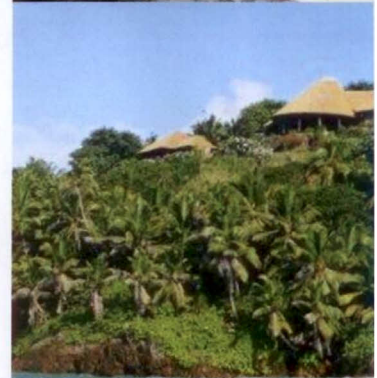
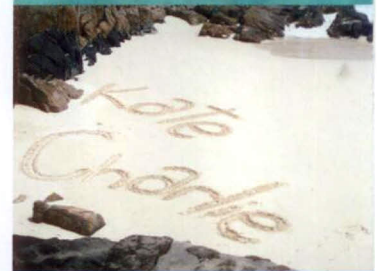


a drone swooped lazily close to us. Sitting in the Pirates’ Bar, a thatched hut a little way uphill and overlooking the sea, I could see in the gathering gloom various perodactyls flying around behind Charlie’s head. I didn’t mention it.

The facilities on Frégate easily live up to the new Oetker Collection label (the island was recently bought up by the folks behind the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d’Antibes and Le Bristol in Paris). There is a lovely ayurvedic spa, staffed by women who smell pleasingly of biscuits, although it was probably some sort of organic massage oil. There is a yacht club, a small marina, a dive centre, a 24-hour gym and the island’s own little museum – as well as three ‘public’ swimming pools, which were entirely empty for our whole stay; each villa has its own private pool and jacuzzi too. Which is nice.

Even more impressively, they unpack and pack for you. Now THAT’S luxury. I’d trade any number of butlers and funny little white-cotton bed/doormat things for the unpacking/packing service. The bed is properly big, with white muslin mosquito nets. Not that you need to worry too much about the mosquitoes – I’m usually a walking all-you-can-eat insect buffet, but here the few bites I did get were no more than a passing ‘I think I need to scratch my... ooh, look at that ENORMOUS tortoise!’

The food was sensational – they grow all their own fruit and veg in a vast hydroponic kitchen garden. The dine-literally-anywhere service is testament to Frégate’s dedication to guests’ whims. I became ▷

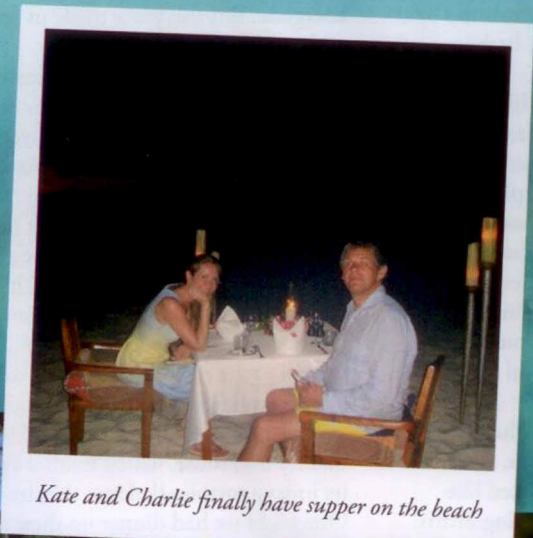


PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK



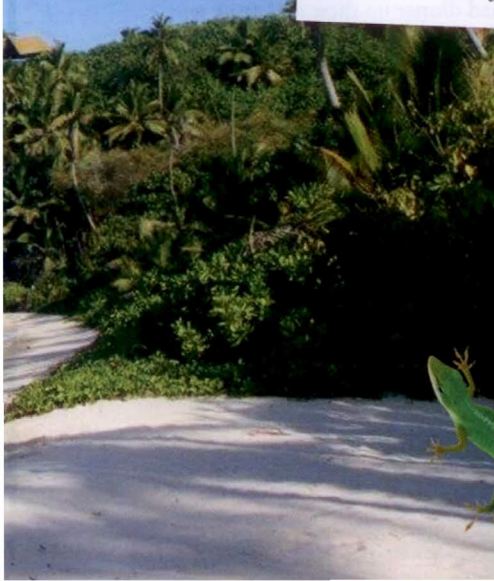
THE BIRDS WHISTLE AT YOU LIKE IMPRESSED BUILDERS

ABOVE, ANSE VICTORIN, ONE OF FREGATE'S SEVEN DESERTED BEACHES. BELOW, KATE AT THE SHORE



Kate and Charlie finally have supper on the beach

A fairy tern, one of the Seychelles' native birds





ABOVE, A FREGATE VILLA.
BELOW, A MASTER BEDROOM



◁ obsessed with the chicken and cashew salad with figs that I had every day for lunch. Charlie, who eats a LOT of meat, said the steak was very good. Fish, which had jumped out of the sea only hours earlier, was delicious, and the lobsters were the size of small dachshunds, but tender and sweet. Even the scrambled eggs and bacon and spaghetti bolognese we ordered for three TV dinners in a row – in the face of increasingly relentless and almost tearfully desperate entreaties by Sumith to JUST ONCE have a romantic barbecue on a deserted beach – were excellent.

The seven beaches are knockout. And, like the rest of the island, largely deserted. At Anse Maquereau, the entirely private beach, there is a double sunbed, a small table with two chairs, a shower, a small cupboard with towels and a phone for calling for more food or rum. Or the lifeguard. Delighted by the occasional signs to watch out for strong currents, I felt completely absolved of any need to go further than thigh deep in the water. I reminded Charlie that we hadn't signed our new, post-marriage will yet, so it would be a real drag if one of us (me) were to drown.

At the appointed hour, Sumith brought lunch, the rum punch still icy in a Thermos. As we ate, we were watched by an audience of lizards that looked like slick metallic torpedoes with furiously beating hearts. They stared at us, heads on one side. We discovered they like coffee.

Emboldened by the rum, Charlie played in the waves, like a brave baby seal. We are not brave people. Or



energetic. But this place made us feel a bit intrepid, without breaking a sweat.

Things we could have done: learned how to dive and gone diving, sailed, deep-sea fished, kayaked, mountain-biked, snorkelled, played tennis, volleyball or badminton, done yoga, hiked various well-planned and riveting nature trails, had breakfast in a treehouse and learned all about the biodiversity of an extraordinary island. What we did: slept, ate till we looked like adolescent manatees, had massages, fed birds croissants and named lizards. Presumably, previous guests such as Bill Gates, The Rolling Stones and Claudia Schiffer weren't quite as lazy as we were. I'm guessing none of them got a sunburned face, either.

At the marina end of the island is the original Plantation House, which holds a little museum that includes a tortoise skeleton the size of a Ford Mondeo. One night we had dinner up there and there were two more honeymooning couples at other tables. I yearned to compare post-wedding notes, but my cheery hello was met with a wan smile and a nod, discouraging further discourse. Frégate is not for the chatty.

But it is for those who want to be spoiled to within an inch of their lives while surrounded by the most extraordinary examples of nature's handiwork. And if that handiwork is of the naked-husband-on-a-beach variety, I've got three words for you: sunglasses, seawater, sunscreen. □

BOOK IT Africa Travel (africatravel.co.uk; 020 7843 3580) offers six nights at Fregate Island from £9,095 a person, including accommodation in a Private Pool Residence, full board, flights and transfers.



BELOW, KATE & NEW FRIENDS.
ABOVE, NEW FRIENDS' POO (& KATE'S FOOT FOR SCALE)



PHOTOGRAPHS: ISTOCK, KATE REARDON

