



## FREGATE ISLAND



*Grant Holmes*

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★★★★★ REVIEWER SCORE: 5.0/5.0

I headed to Fregate Island Private with a mind-set that I suspect is typical of many first-time guests. Days spent on the beach, nights in a lovely villa, an organic meal or two under the stars, and sighting of a few giant turtles thrown in for good measure.

Being somewhat of a cynic when it comes to luxury marketing, I have to admit I didn't initially buy into Fregate Island's website promises. But I was wrong. Fregate markets itself as a 'unique on the planet' resort, something it genuinely lives up to and more. The eco-diversity of the island, its approach to sustainability and the sheer array of interesting things to do will pique the interest of even the most jaded traveller.

Of course Fregate Island is most famous for its turtles and tropical bird populations. The giant Aldabra tortoises, some 2000 plus in numbers, can live up to 170 years. The sight of them is an amazing sight for both the young and old. So bring the kids if you have some, as the kid's club here is renowned as one of the best a resort can offer with, of course, turtle-related events and treasure hunts and all kinds of activities to keep the young ones happy while adults relax and unwind in this paradise.

Yet things weren't always so sweet. As a luxury private island resort, Fregate Island Private has had its ups and downs over the years. And so three years ago, the island's owner appointed the Oetker Collection to manage the property and the rest is history, as the saying goes.



GOLDEN PALM AWARD  
2016

### BARING IT ALL +

- Think ultra-luxury Jurassic Park where the wildlife won't eat you
- Turtles, turtles everywhere, and beautiful birds in flight
- The poster child for enlightened, luxury conservation and sustainability
- Stay at least a week; this island is full of surprises

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## Arrival Experience

There is something very exciting about arriving anywhere in a helicopter and arriving here is something really special. In fact it's a scene right out of Jurassic Park as, for those who've seen the film, that's exactly what the island looks like. Lush and exotic with dense jungle made even more exciting by the tortoises (the world's 3rd largest colony of these gentle giants) that dot the island airstrip and helipad.

Landing between the tortoises wasn't an issue however. And so for me the adventure of a lifetime began. A number of staff, including the GM, were on hand to welcome me which made for a wonderfully personal arrival. This, it turns out, is a courtesy that is extended to every guest arriving at Fregate. Also on hand was my dedicated butler who ferried me away in a hybrid golf buggy that was to be mine for my stay (one is allocated to every villa), describing interesting facts and figures about the island and habitat along the way.

## Rooms & Suites

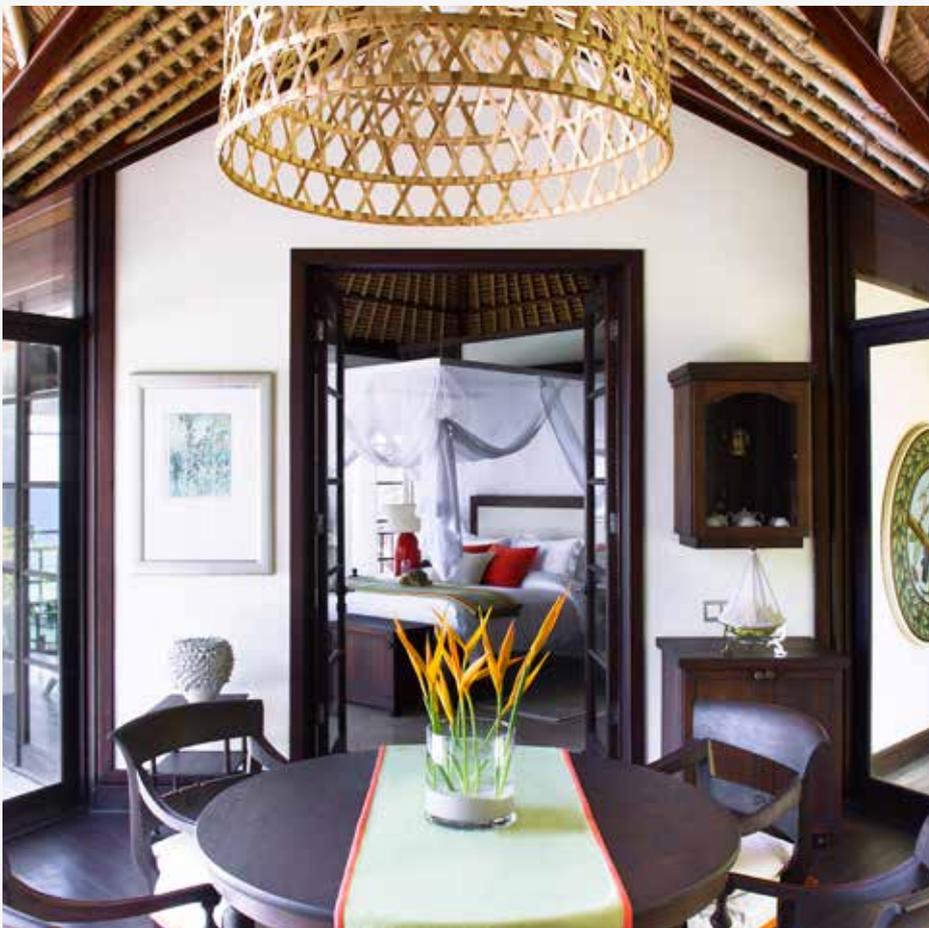
Villas are enormous at 450 m<sup>2</sup> (4800 ft<sup>2</sup>) and are dotted along one side of the island, all extremely private with stellar ocean views. Laid out with three distinct pavilions, each boasts a large and wonderfully comfortable lounge pavilion, a huge bedroom pavilion

that also features the bathroom, WC and shower and a dining vestibule which links the two that opens on to an enormous sun deck. Head downstairs and you will find yourself on yet another enormous deck with a full sized infinity swimming pool and jacuzzi along with a covered outdoor dining area and huge Balinese day bed. Island luxury on a grand scale.

Classically elegant with an abundance of chocolate polished woods, villas are decorated in cream marble with beige and straw colours throughout. This muted palette is brought to life with colourful artwork, soft furnishings, coral and teal coloured cushions and an abundance of white billowing curtains. The end result is a truly elegant space.

In the lounge area are two counters, one with a Nespresso machine and a large variety of coffee capsules and a fridge with milk and other goodies underneath. The other counter has an impressively stocked wine cooler and a mini bar. The minibar concept was a little confusing, as for an all-inclusive resort one would assume that the contents of the minibar and wine fridge were included. But a minibar price list located alongside indicated this was not the case so I didn't drink down the offerings.

There is a large HDTV in the lounge pavilion featuring a good variety of satellite TV channels as well as access to Netflix. Another TV is located in the bedroom pavilion.



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The bedroom pavilion is a fantastic size, featuring a full king size bed, a chaise longue, an armchair, and a vast wardrobe. Not that I needed to worry about unpacking, hanging or repacking as my butler took care of all this for me, the ultimate indulgence.

One important aspect of these villas is that they are fully enclosed and thus air-conditioned. The advantage is that it keeps nature on the outside and while all creatures great and small here on the island are completely harmless, every bug is super-sized and the millipedes are showstoppers.

And for those who cannot disconnect, WiFi is available in all villas with a very strong signal that did not drop out at excellent speeds.

## The Bathroom

Separated by a large unit behind the bed, the open plan bathroom runs the entire width of the pavilion. The end result is a huge double basin vanity with enough space to spread out for a long stay. The area also features a separate WC and bidet along with a large indoor walk-in shower and a soaking tub. All of this looks out over a delightful small garden with an outdoor shower.

Lighting is excellent and there are abundant candles all over. Outlets for the hairdryer are well positioned

although for us gents needing to shave, the height and positioning of the shaving mirror wasn't so great.

In keeping with Fregate's serious conservation and environmental cred, you will see very little use of plastic in these bathrooms and most items such as toiletries and soaps come in cardboard wrapping. The company does not use branded toiletries, but instead, shower gels and shampoos come in ceramic bottles.

## Dining Experience

Fregate House is the main restaurant that is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner but it's rather a mute point. The whole dining concept of Fregate Island is 'anything, anywhere, anytime'. There are menus but you are encouraged to head 'off piste' and simply let the chef know what you fancy eating. As long as he has it on the island, it's yours, anytime, anywhere.

And there are a whole host of unique dining locations scattered across the island. Perhaps a romantic beach BBQ for two (you'll be the only ones on the candle and torch lit sand) or perhaps, as I did, breakfast way up in a tree-house located in the jungle canopy? It was an amazing and unique experience with the best continental breakfast I have ever had.



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In-room dining is also an option and orders from the restaurant menu or a specially prepared seafood BBQ on your pool deck are offered.

I dined one evening on the restaurant terrace where the food was exceptionally good. I went with the beetroot cheesecake as a starter followed by a freshly caught jack fish fillet dish as a mains. Both choices were scrumptious, perfectly cooked and delightfully presented. I would have thought that the remoteness of the island here would make it tough for the smooth running of food and beverage operations but this was not the case. There were plenty of decadent and delicious options at every turn.

With the exception of my tree-house experience, I went with breakfast in my villa and like every other meal, it was excellent every time. The menu featured a large range of continental and cooked items with some excellent egg dishes.

## Spa & Wellness

The Rock Spa here is completely in keeping with the rest of the resort. There are lots of polished wood and stone features within large and airy open spaces. Located quite literally on a rock, it's a very tranquil environment and has its own swimming pool. Treatment rooms, like the rest of the spa complex, are light and airy. The treatment menu is reasonably stock

standard but my therapist was excellent and I came away feeling wonderfully jelly-like and my irksome sore shoulder, completely pain free.

## Pool & Beach

There are seven beaches to choose from on the island so I headed off in my buggy to find the beach I liked. A fish-shaped wooden sign indicated the beach of my choice was free and unoccupied. Turning the fish around so the sign read: 'Beach in Use' meant that it was all mine for as long as I wanted. Here I found sun loungers, towels, a covered but open-sided beach hut complete with chairs and a table, and a cooler full of ice and a variety of drinks.

I also spent time by my pool. Every villa features a full-length infinity pool overlooking the ocean as well as a jacuzzi. The pool deck has an outdoor dining pagoda and a large, covered Balinese daybed for relaxing.

## Staff & Service

Every villa has its own dedicated butler. Mine appeared and disappeared at exactly the right moment each day. Not only did he take care of everything in my villa but he also arranged meals, took care of laundry and ensured that I was comfortable and enjoying my stay. He seemed to slip in and out as if by magic and never disturbed my privacy.

In fact, without exception, every staff member (including the island's two ecologists) I encountered were incredibly skilled and genuinely warm and friendly. Every guest here is pampered and made to feel nothing is too much trouble.

## Guest profile

A strong German and European contingent, South Africans and the odd Hollywood celebrity or two.

## Departure Experience

Leaving was as slick as everything else on this island paradise. By magic my baggage, packed by the butler, was collected and taken to the helipad while I drove myself in my buggy down to the airstrip where the team were waiting to say goodbye. My helicopter appeared right on cue and, very reluctantly, I headed off.

