

The lush green fields of Sayan village in Bali offer the perfect paradisiacal retreat for the soul.

# AGRITOURISM: BACK TO THE ROOTS

As people become more conscious and curious about the food they eat, the appeal of luxurious rural retreats offering hands-on experiences of farm life is fast becoming a tempting treat to savour.

By PALLAVI PASRICHA

THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD HAS brought some form of change in all of us. And the need to return to one's roots and appreciate the earth's bounty is stronger than ever before. It is hardly surprising then that specially curated holidays that help you get close to nature are becoming increasingly popular. It's a new travel trend that calls for sprawling farm retreats and luxury resorts across the world to offer jaded city dwellers a chance to reconnect with the land that grows their food. Think activities that include plucking fruits, tending to farm animals, joining efforts to save coral reefs, and more. For these vacations, all you need to pack are your most comfortable jeans and prepare to get your hands dirty and your soul refreshed as nature works its charm and draws you into its welcoming arms.

**GOING ORGANIC**  
As the culinary world leans towards organic produce, some resorts offer the opportunity to experience the painstaking effort involved in growing crops without chemicals. Japan became home to the world's first agritourism resort in 2019 with the opening of Risonare Nasu, a luxurious property that is part of

## ESCAPE NATURE

a large organic farm. Surrounded by vast fields, green forests, and a river gushing through it, the resort sits near Mount Nasu, just 90 minutes from the bustling city of Tokyo, and presents a serene slice of nature wherever one's gaze falls. Guests staying here can attend daily farming classes, learning how to sow seeds and grow vegetables at the two large greenhouses where as many as 100 herbs and 80 vegetables are planted. As a special treat, guests can pluck herbs to add flavour to their cup of tea. The resort is home to a spa and a hot spring, as well. The 43 rooms here were previously part of a design hotel and are framed with large glass windows to keep one connected to the surroundings.

The 'cultivacation' trend is catching on in Africa, as well, where a holiday is usually associated with a wildlife safari. Now, it also offers a chance to understand the continent's varied farm culture and an opportunity to get up close with its animals and birds. One of the most historic and best-preserved farmyards can be found in South Africa, close to Cape Town, in Franschhoek wine valley. The Babylonstoren farm dates back to 1692 and some of its old structures—a manor house, an old cellar, and a fowl house—stand intact even today. Check into this massive garden-hotel and learn how to grow your own vegetables, watch honeybees in action, and pick up useful skills such as indoor gardening



Left: The secluded environs of Risonare Nasu, Japan, offer a serene break from city life. Below (from left): The Babylonstoren resort in South Africa allows guests to reconnect with nature while working on the farm; The charming Apfelhotel Torgglerhof in Italy is blessed with a fresh, rustic-chic vibe.



and even learning how to pick and press flowers. Besides farming, there are several other activities to enjoy—spend time bird spotting or head out to a dam on the sprawling farm premises for trout fishing, swimming, or rowing. Babel, the in-house restaurant, follows a farm-to-fork philosophy, so guests can enjoy fresh, seasonal food at all times.

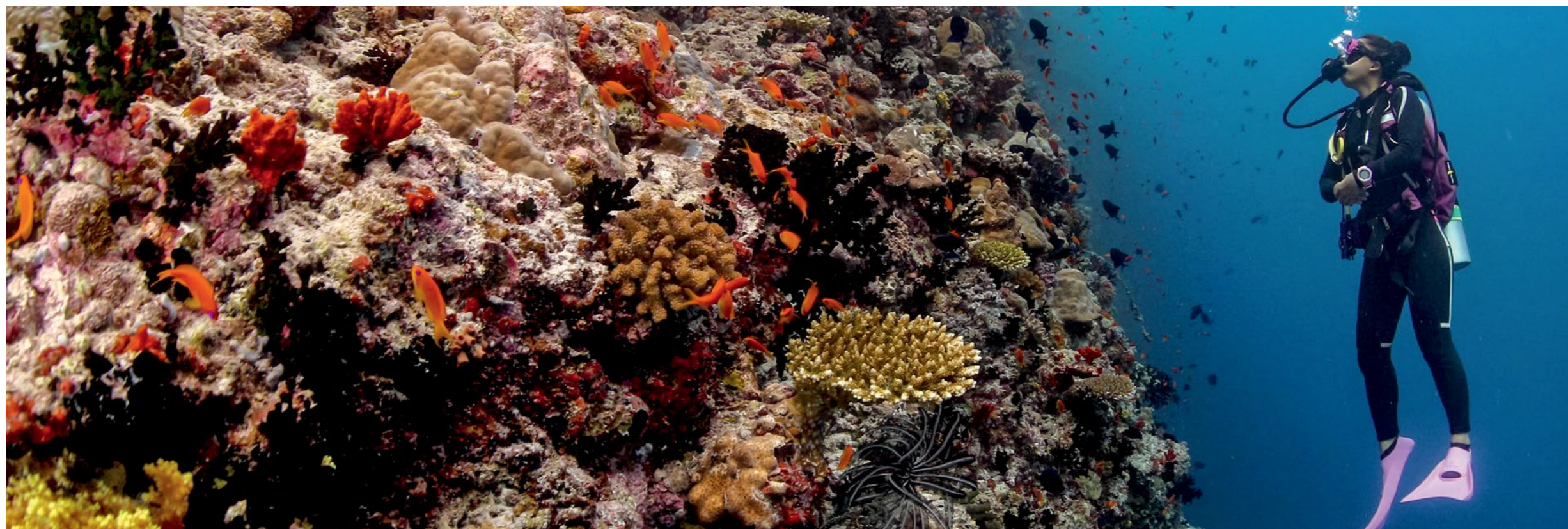
### APPLES, VINEYARDS, AND CHEESE

Some of the world's most popular agritourism resorts can be found in balmy Mediterranean countries that are lush fruit-growing regions and home to gorgeous, endless vineyards. The Apfelhotel Torgglerhof (Apple Hotel) in Italy's stunning South Tyrol region is one such farm-cum-hotel with sprawling apple orchards and vineyards. During peak apple harvest time, from August till mid-October, guests can help pick the fruit while learning about the seven varieties grown on the plush property. And after a relaxing session of enjoying some wine and cheese, guests can

head straight to the source and pluck some of the wonderful blue grapes that produce the famed Pinot Noir wine. The property is also outfitted with all the amenities one may desire; its 40 rooms include suites, lofts, barns, and a chalet. There's even a wellness centre that features a spa and sauna, adding just the right touch of luxury.

After sessions on winemaking, can cheese be far behind? Those seeking a quiet escape in picturesque surroundings, with a generous dose of this delectable dairy treat, should head straight to film director Mansoor Khan's 22-acre organic cheesemaking farm on the hilly slopes of Nilgiris in Coonoor, Tamil Nadu. At Acres Wild Farmstay, guests get the chance to taste 20 gourmet varieties of cheese produced there and learn the entire process of how to make it over a two-day course. Funnily enough, the three cottages at this sustainable farm are appropriately named after cheese—Colby, Cheddar, and Haloumi House.

“The guests ‘adopt’ the coral they plant and even after they go home, they can follow its progress with photo updates and, of course, return visits. Our Dive Centre team’s target is to plant at least 300 coral fragments per year. In the past year, we grew over 1,200 fragments in our three nurseries combined,” says Tom Brown, the marine biologist at Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas. “Our guests love the experience and the idea of being able to contribute to the preservation of our reef.”



Images courtesy of respective properties

**UNDERWATER GARDENING**

We all know there’s a beautiful world that exists deep in our oceans, and it’s a world that needs to be protected. On the idyllic islands of Maldives, many resorts are working to save the beautiful coral reefs and offer their guests, including children, an opportunity to participate in unusual underwater gardening initiatives. The Coral Adoption Programme started in 2011 by Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas focusses on the regeneration of Baa Atoll’s coral reefs. As part of this project, guests help collect broken fragments of coral from the sea, which are then attached to ropes or a frame that acts as scaffolding and allows the coral to regenerate. These are nurtured for around 18 months before being transplanted back to the reef. This popular programme attracts nearly 50 families and couples every year.

**THE WONDERS OF RICE**

Ever wonder about the effort that goes into putting this loved grain on your plate? If yes, then head to the Four Seasons at Sayan in Bali, Indonesia. This award-winning resort, set on a hill along the Ayung River, offers the chance to connect with nature while learning all about rice with their ‘A Day in the Life of a Balinese Farmer’ plan. The day begins early with a hike through the forest to Sayan village where guests enjoy a simple breakfast with local farmers. This is followed by a trip into the muddy paddy fields to plant rice. A truly invigorating experience.

**A CHILD’S WORLD**

The beauty of the agritourism trend is that it appeals to everyone, regardless of age. Which is why the programmes offered by these luxury

From top: A diver exploring the colourful corals at Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas; The picturesque environs of Four Seasons at Sayan in Bali.

resorts around the world ensure there is something meaningful for children to experience, as well. For instance, at Risonare Nasu in Japan, children can embark on a charming treasure hunt in the forest to collect pine cones and walnut shells. At the South African farm stay, kids can feed donkeys and play with farm animals like tortoises, chickens, turkeys, and ducks. And in the Maldives, a ‘Kids Marine Biology Programme’ teaches children about the reef ecosystem, through fun, creative interactions. Children above the age of eight can learn snorkelling.

The world is filled with wonders; so take this chance to return to the basics and give your soul the gift of nature. ⚙️