



THE MALDIVES

ISLAND ISOLATION

There's room aplenty to spread out in these magical Maldivian hideaways



Dive into island life at Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru



« FOUR SEASONS RESORT MALDIVES AT LANDAA GIRAAVARU

The skies are so vast and sparkling in the Maldives the idea of sleeping under an ordinary flat ceiling is unthinkable. Instead, the double-height vaulted bedrooms in the Four Seasons at Landaa Giraavaru create an expansive sense of freedom and overlook private pools long enough for a proper swim. Luscious hibiscus and glossy cheese plants surround the thatched outdoor living room, and beyond a bosky thicket of exotic plants the sea washes onto spotless white sand. There are 102 villas here, but in the evening when the restaurants fill with people, you rather wonder where these fellow guests have been all day – indulging in room service or upside down, doing weightless yoga? Under the bright blue sky, hammocks hang loose between palm trees and the four swimming pools are



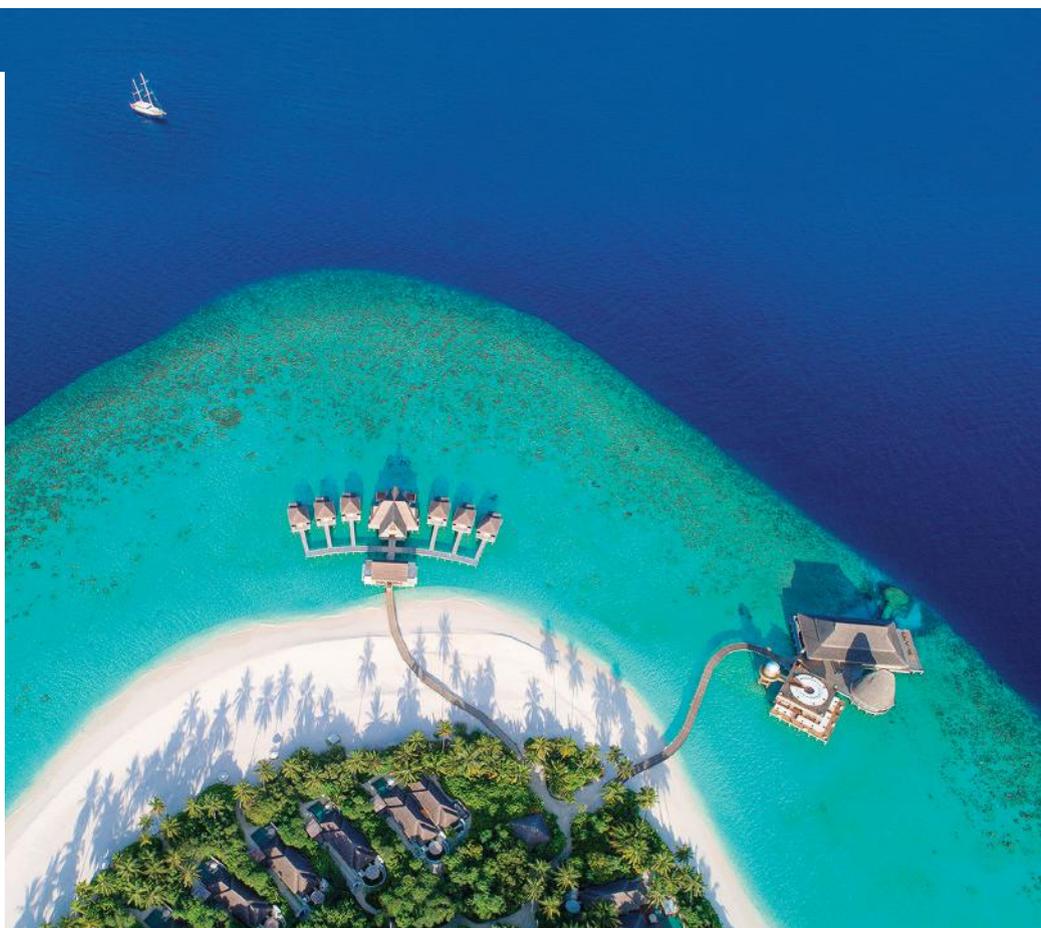
exclusively yours for the day – one is the only Olympic-sized facility in the Maldives. The spa is brilliant, with an Ayurvedic massage that takes clients on a transcendental journey for 90 minutes. Don't miss the Marine Discovery Centre, where injured turtles and fish come to recuperate with the in-house marine biologists. A heavenly idyll.

BOOK IT: From £6,569pp for three nights B&B from 21 September, followed by three nights on the Four Seasons Explorer catamaran taking part in the Manta Trust diving expedition. Includes flights and transfers. elegantresorts.co.uk

ANANTARA KIHAVAH VILLAS »

This glorious tree-filled paradise with views over envy-inducing empty stretches of Instagram-worthy private beaches is just what the doctor ordered after the first half of 2020. Offering so much more than just the three S's, more active travellers can revel in days packed with Land Rover drives, star-gazing with the in-house astronomer, underwater dining (and wine tasting!), and unrivalled snorkelling and diving in the UNESCO protected seas. Splice up that action with plenty of time to just be, whether that's submitting mind and body to the experts in the spa or just meditative breathing in your beachside villa, taking in those views. For dedicated spa bunnies, you could even opt for some more serious non-surgical intervention – senior aesthetic and wellness nurse, Nur Laili, offers everything from platelet rich plasma treatments and meso facials to IV drips to replenish your system after a long flight, or too many champagne cocktails at the Sky bar.

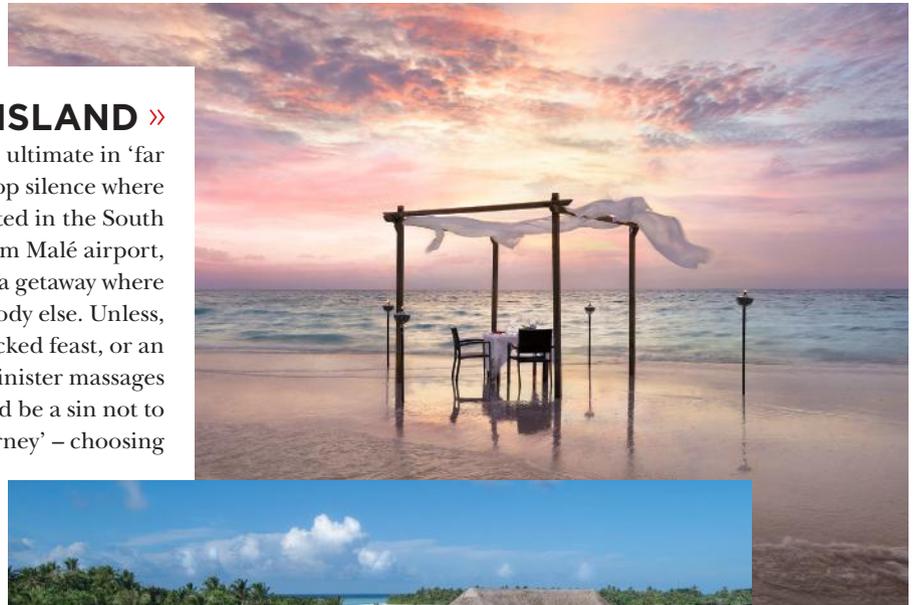
BOOK IT: From £7,053 for two people for six nights, including snorkelling with manta rays, stargazing at the Maldives' only over-water observatory, and dining underwater at Sea restaurant. Until 31 October 2021. kihavah-maldives.anantara.com



NALADHU PRIVATE ISLAND »

Translated as ‘beautiful island’, Naladhu is the ultimate in ‘far from the madding crowd’ privacy, offering pin-drop silence where rest and relaxation are the order of the day. Located in the South Malé Atoll, a nifty half-hour speed boat ride from Malé airport, just 20 spacious and immaculate residences offer a getaway where you literally don’t have to clap your eyes on anybody else. Unless, that is, you want a private chef to cook you up a wicked feast, or an in-house spa therapist with healing hands to administer massages beside your own swimming pool. In fact, it would be a sin not to submit to Naladhu’s famous in-room ‘spa journey’ – choosing between Ayurvedic, Thai, Balinese or Western programmes. Once you’ve got over your jet lag and your body’s feeling soft and supple, head out for activities such as kayaking, snorkelling and swimming with sharks, should the mood take you. Come here for nothing more than the sand under your toes, the salty sea water against your skin, the sun on your face and every conceivable anxiety taken care of. Sounds like the perfect holiday. And you can always book out the entire island should you either be planning the reunion of the century or really can’t stand the thought of anybody else being around.

BOOK IT: From £954 B&B for an ocean house with a pool. anantara.com



« EMERALD MALDIVES RESORT & SPA

Mastering the tricky all-inclusive concept is the recently opened Emerald Maldives Resort & Spa, found in the northwestern part of the Maldives archipelago. Villas are available to book for a lower rate than many of the resort’s all-inclusive competitors, though this certainly doesn’t come at the price of design, facilities or service, all of which are impeccable. Once you’re on the island, there’s no need to worry about additional costs – bar a few extras, such as jet skiing – adding a new level of relaxation. With 20 hectares of land to play with, Emerald has more space than many Maldivian resorts too, allowing privacy across the 120 villas, which are split between the beach and the water. Food is a highlight, with four restaurants to explore including Amazónico, the first South American restaurant in the Maldives: a rainforest-style, lantern-bedecked space with an open fire grill. ‘Natural elegance’ is the hotel’s tagline: bamboo, langhi langhi leaves and stones create a tropical-chic vibe in which the architecture exists in harmony with the natural landscape. Italian influences can also be seen in aspects of the design – the Venetian-inspired bathrooms are worthy of a special mention, featuring white marble, freestanding baths and floor-to-ceiling windows boasting some of the best views in the whole of the Maldives. And the bar is set high.

BOOK IT: From £550 all-inclusive for a deluxe beach villa. emerald-maldives.com



« JW MARRIOTT MALDIVES

Straw hats off to JW Marriott. With its ultra-private supersize villas, sensational food and abundance of water sports, the brand has raised the bar yet again with its spanking new resort in the Maldives. Set on the remote island of Vagary in the northern atoll of Shaviyani, this beach retreat has 60 thatched villas, each with a private pool and thakuru (butler). Pops of cream, blue and natural materials echo the surroundings with massive expanses of glass to draw the outside in. When beachside lounging gets too much, get stuck into the preposterously long list of water activities on offer – the snorkelling turtle quest is a must.



Back on dry land, drop your little ones off at the fantastic kids' club before heading to the sublime overwater spa (book the deeply healing stress relief massage). The five restaurants in the resort stretch from Italian to Thai – don't miss the Japanese teppanyaki at Hashi, run by former Nobu chef Namuraj Tamang. Grab a cocktail beforehand in Rum Baan, nestled in the treetops, which has a staggering 98 signature rums to sample. Or, for the all-out local experience, go for a traditional Malaafai dinner on the beach. You won't regret it.

BOOK IT: From approx. £681 B&B for a pool villa. marriott.co.uk

GILI LANKANFUSHI »

Gili Lankanfushi has won a swag of awards for best resort in the Maldives and Asia – and it's not hard to see why. It's postcard perfect – from the blindingly white sand beaches fringed by swaying palms, to the room-temperature green ocean, to the champagne, sashimi and feet-in-the-sand breakfasts, to some of the best snorkelling in the Southern Hemisphere. It's even changed its clocks to 'island-time', so guests enjoy an extra hour of sunlight. When you arrive at the North Atoll by speedboat (20 minutes from Malé airport), you surrender your shoes as part of the No Shoes, No News policy. Your butler then takes you to your spacious over-water villa. Each guest gets use of a bike, but it's tempting – initially at least – to not leave your luxuriously appointed new home. Whole days can pass pleurably as you loll on the villa's hammocks, daybeds and in the upper deck area (where a bed can be made up to sleep under the stars). If you feel energetic, you can jump off your back deck to have a quick snorkel. Once you do venture out, activities include the sunset dolphin cruise, surf lessons and diving. But it's tempting to just chill. The spa is divine. Drift off during your Ayurvedic massage while looking at bull sharks and manta rays as they swim past the glass spa floor.

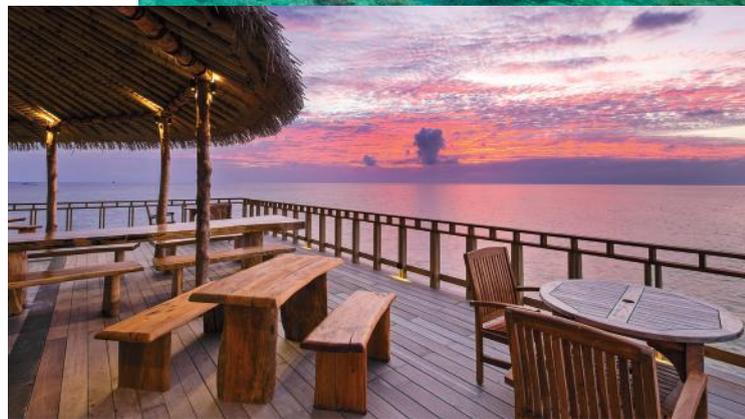
BOOK IT: Doubles from approx. £1,157.
gili-lankanfushi.com



FURAVERI ISLAND RESORT & SPA »

A humble island intrinsically connected with its destination and situated near a UNESCO biosphere reserve, Furaveri offers enticing dive sites and manta ray hotspots. Entirely un-reclaimed, meaning the development of the island has had minimal impact on its surroundings, here is a place that champions natural beauty with a glorious, unspoilt beach that elegantly wraps itself around the lush 23-hectare island. Friendly and unpretentious, it's a great alternative to the glitz and glamour of many other Maldivian resorts. Woven among a dense jungle retreat, the understated chic of the 107 villas offer spacious, marble-finished bathrooms with huge egg-like bathtubs, whilst the beach pool villas feature laissez-faire cabanas filled with the sound of the ocean. From a Mexican grapefruit margarita on the perimeter of the reef to Japanese dishes from an interactive Teppanyaki counter, Furaveri offers diners a global menu. Much of its organic produce is sourced from its considerable chef garden, which nurtures chilli trees, herbs, fruit and vegetables for both guests and those who live and work there. The island also houses its very own on-site bottling plant, where up to 360 tonnes of seawater is transformed into drinking water.

BOOK IT: From £295 for a beachfront villa full board. furaveri.com



« INTERCONTINENTAL MALDIVES MAAMUNAGAU RESORT

Here's the thing – it's not hard to find silky soft sand and azure waters in the Maldives. What truly sets this resort apart is the way it makes you feel. From the moment you step onto the arrival jetty and are welcomed like a long-lost friend with a cool drink and warm hug, you get a sense of home. The meticulous attention to detail extends beyond each room's bricolage interiors, and is infused in every interaction you have with staff. A dedicated island curator will be on hand to make your stay seamless, organising snorkelling trips, stargazing, beach picnics, outdoor movie nights, spa treatments, and even unpacking and repacking your suitcase. It's also the first InterContinental resort to offer Club InterContinental benefits to all guests, including complimentary afternoon tea and aperitif cocktails. Enclaved within the Maldives' largest lagoon, you needn't venture too far to swim among rays, sharks, turtles and schools of fish. There are six dining spots but Fish Market, with its open kitchen and indoor/outdoor seating truly stands out with a bold menu that's bursting with aromatic, south-east Asian flavour. The overwater spa is heavenly but for a truly transformative treatment, book in with the Chinese medicine doctor whose methods include acupuncture, cupping, remedial tui-na, herbal medicine and other ancient techniques to restore internal balance.

BOOK IT: From approx. £791 for a beach pool villa. maldives.intercontinental.com



« WALDORF ASTORIA MALDIVES ITHAAFUSHI

This highly anticipated new opening takes barefoot luxury to the next level from the moment you land. While others wait to pile onto tiny seaplane transfers, an air-conditioned Princess yacht with sun deck (and four bedrooms) whisks new arrivals, champagne in hand, on a blissful 40-minute cruise to the resort. Forget any corporate connotations – this Waldorf Astoria maximises on marrying innovative and imaginative concepts (think photogenic tree-top bamboo dining nests at the superb Terra restaurant and glass-bottomed spa treatment rooms for mid-massage shark spotting) with sophistication and relaxed comfort. Spread across three private islands joined by bridges, it's one of the Maldives' larger hotels – though with comparatively fewer villas, there's a total sense of privacy. Villas are vast. Some overwater, others on the beach, and reef villas: a bit of both. Floor-to-ceiling windows look out onto a spacious deck with a private infinity pool big enough to really swim in. With snorkels delivered to your door, and a house reef teeming with a technicolour array of sea life just a short swim away, one could easily never leave their villa. Make sure you do, though, as with 11 restaurants, a sublime spa and an abundance of water sports and excursions on offer, there's so much to see and savour in this truly exceptional spot.

BOOK IT: Reef villa with pool from £1,480 B&B.

waldorfastoriamaldives.com



LUX* NORTH MALÉ ATOLL »

If your vibe is more Miami than Maldives, then you'll love the newest opening from the sexy Lux* group, in the North Malé Atoll, easily reached by speed boat or a 15-minute sea plane hop. Nautically inspired blindingly white duplex villas accented with zesty pops of pink and red, cut a different shape to the traditional Maldivian Robinson Crusoe-esque abodes.

Whether it's overwater or on the island's golden sand beach, each villa has a spacious deck, Instagrammable turquoise and pink tiled infinity pool as well as an upstairs open-air lounge area – a unique offering with panoramic views of the Indian Ocean, perfect for sunset gazing and dolphin spotting. There's an energy to this resort, in contrast to other so-laid-back-they're-

horizontal islands. Guests are busy jet skiing, water skiing, snorkelling and playing tennis. All that action calls for some of the best food on offer in the Maldives.

In-villa dining is taken to new heights with the option of floating breakfasts and lunches beautifully served on trays while you stay cool in the pool (and pose for a photo or two). And don't miss Inti, the Japanese-Peruvian fusion spot, serving world class fresh ceviche and sushi, under the twinkling stars.

BOOK IT: Water villa from £925 B&B basis.

luxresorts.com



**THE RESIDENCE
MALDIVES AT DHIGURAH >>**

Just 13 miles north of the equator, this resort is remote even by Maldivian standards. Too far from capital Malé to travel by seaplane, it can only be reached on a 55-minute domestic flight and final speedboat ride to secluded Gaafu Alifu, one of the world's largest and deepest atolls. The island itself is thick with jungle, sandy pathways weaving through banana and coconut trees for a real back-to-nature feel. There are 173 villas, from beachfront to overwater with either sunrise or sunset views, but none will disappoint. All are spacious but simply designed, with thatched roofs, neutral colours and teak and rattan interiors, and all come with private pools, bicycles and Insta-perfect views of the glowing, aquamarine sea and endless horizon beyond. There are water-sports galore, dolphin-watching cruises, a kids' club, glorious 42-metre infinity pool, Clarins spa and the resort's own deserted island for an unmissable picnic lunch. Otherwise, feast on international flavours at the Dining Room, classic Cantonese fare at Li Bai and the Mediterranean menu at poolside Café del Sol, or cycle the stunning one-kilometre bridge to Falhumaafushi to sample the excellent restaurants at the resort's neighbouring sister property. A double delight.

BOOK IT: A Book Now Stay Later package offers up to 50 per cent off the best available rate, for stays anytime from 1 October 2020 to 31 October 2021, when booking minimum four nights. Doubles from £328. cenizaro.com



<< VARU

A relative newcomer, Varu opened in late 2019. Located on the north-west edge of the Malé Atoll, it's just a 40-minute speedboat ride from Malé airport. On arrival, a golf buggy whisks guests to one of 108 beach-front or overwater villas, each with inviting décor featuring both luxurious and natural elements, with additions such as open-air bathrooms and private pools. Regardless of accommodation, every guest is on an all-inclusive plan that covers non-motorized water sports, a range of excursions (including stargazing and fishing), all meals and an impressive array of drinks (for example – the minibar is, dangerously, replenished twice daily). Dining options include a contemporary buffet and traditional Maldivian restaurant, complete with educational video on arrival. Unwind in the Elena spa, where face-down time is enhanced by views through the floor's window onto the water, or lounge by the infinity pool for dreamy sunset views. Recreational options range from a games room (great for those scorching midday hours) to an Astro football pitch, to the free use of snorkelling equipment – perfect for reef exploration that can be accessed, blissfully, from your very own living space.

BOOK IT: Seven nights from £2,799pp, including transfers. varu-atmosphere.com ■