

World Traveller

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The Indian Ocean resorts we're flying in for

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A mere four-hour flight separates us from the cotton-soft sands and glassy seas of the Indian Ocean's big-hitter islands of the Maldives and Seychelles. We've rounded up the pick of the hotels on each island - from those with dreamy above-the-ocean villas to remote escapes chockful of castaway appeal. So, what are you waiting for?



Maldives

From above, the Maldives looks more like a work of abstract art than points on a map — its 1,192 islands, stretching from the southern tip of Sri Lanka to a smidge below the equator, are nothing but pinpricks of gold and green against endless sea. There simply isn't anywhere else like it on Earth at ground level (which incidentally rises a maximum of 2.4 metres above the water's level, making this the lowest lying country in the world). There are no bad beaches, nor ugly islands, and there's plenty of marine life — but that doesn't mean the Maldives is one-dimensional. Many of the coral reefs around the South Malé atoll have been damaged by a combination of a worldwide bleaching that began in 2014, coupled with a growth in huge construction projects around the capital Malé. This area is still great if you want a quick boat transfer from the airport and are happy just to loll on a beach, unperturbed by a bit of sea traffic and the lights of nearby resorts. But if you're looking for the kind of splendid isolation and marine life that the Maldives is

famous for, splash out the extra on a return seaplane transfer further afield. Popular choices include the Baa atoll, a UNESCO-protected biosphere, and the Raa atoll. Alternatively, the Lhivayani and Shaviyani atolls are less developed, with coral that came through the bleaching trauma almost unscathed. Noonu, in the north, is where the jet-setters head to, while the south has larger islands and is known for its marine species — it can also be reached by normal flights if you don't fancy the seaplane. Wherever you decide to go, expect to find some of the best-trained staff and highest service standards in the world, with enough to do to keep even the most active visitor entertained. All-inclusive packages have become more widespread and could be the way to go in a country where almost everything has to be imported. Just be sure to check exactly what's covered before you book: the best deals throw in watersports, fitness classes and experiences as well as food and drink. If you're looking for gold-standard fly-and-flop relaxation, you will love the Maldives.

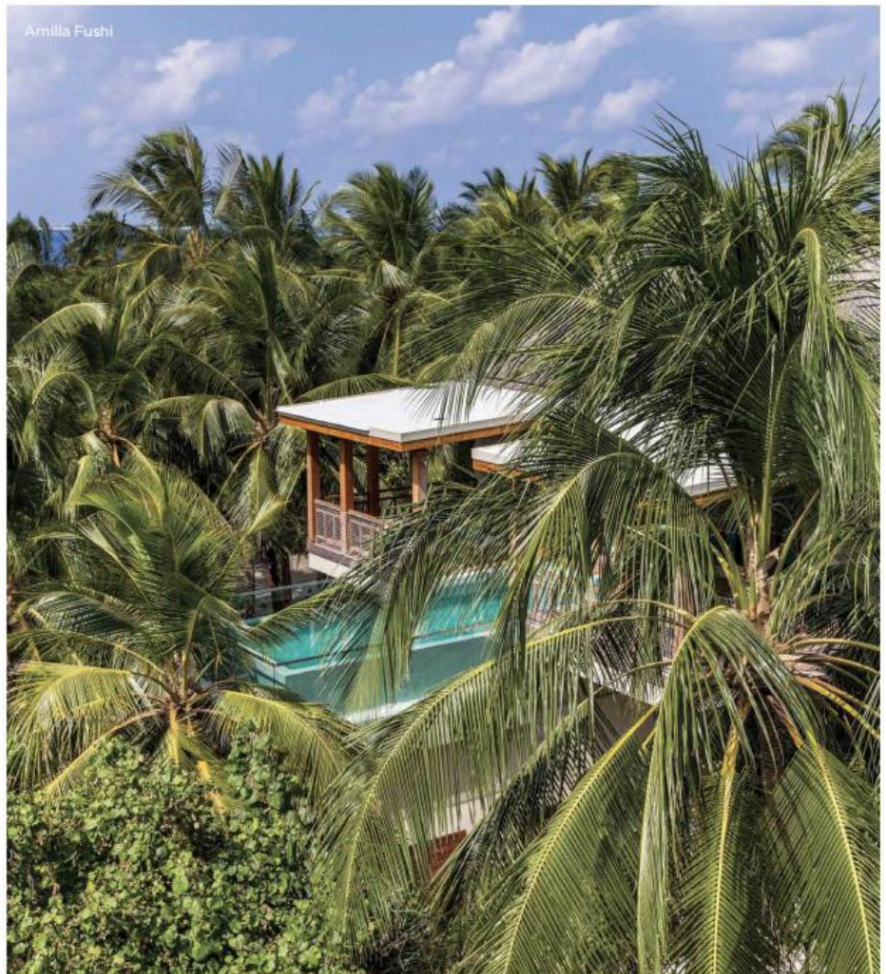
Baros

This long-established all-villa resort on a tiny private island in the North Malé Atoll is a hop from the international airport. The diving centre has PADI instructors and marine biologists, and it sorts free snapshots of your underwater explorations. The food is hit-and-miss, but the sea views from the fine-dining Lighthouse Restaurant make for an unforgettable experience.



Amilla Fushi

Hip vibes and Saint-Tropez-ish design have attracted the likes of Kate Winslet and Kate Moss to Amilla Fushi's shores. Choose from three villa types — beach, overwater or 'treehouses' with raised pools. The surrounding Baa Atoll is home to more than 1,200 species of fish and top dive sites, but its UNESCO-protected status has made it very busy. Even so, it's home to a flourishing reef, with a mini 'blue hole' — an underwater cavern — to swim into.



Anantara Dhigu

Value is hard to come by in the Maldives, but Dhigu does it in spades. A 35-minute speedboat trip from the airport, it's the cheapest of three conjoined resorts, and you can use the facilities of the other two, too — often for free — though the beach, spa and main pool are nicer here than at the neighbours. If you're booking as a couple, they'll try to upsell you next door because that's 'adults only', but Dhigu is big enough that it never gets crowded with hordes of children, so decline and spend your saving in the non-buffet restaurants instead.

Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas

After undergoing a lavish renovation, the residence options at this private island resort redefine luxury. An invitation for those who require secluded rejuvenation, the Beach Pool and Overwater Pool residences offer exclusivity of the highest kind. Combining luxury and bespoke services, each of the accommodation choices is equipped with the latest technology, a Bose sound system, in-villa wine cellar and a Villa Host – on call 24-hours a day – to attend to your every whim.

This Baa Atoll resort, situated in a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, confirms that to enjoy Mother Nature you need to get wet – here, by Hanifaru Bay, you'll brag about snorkelling alongside the Indian Ocean's healthiest populations of whale sharks and manta rays. Watery thrills are the name of the game in-resort, too: try wine-tasting in the underwater SEA restaurant (the cellar has over 450 labels); soak in your glass-bottomed bath and stargaze through the Maldives' biggest telescope at SKY – the only overwater observatory in the country.

Plus, now with even more gastronomical choice – and an expansive spa menu – the island is a superior option for those who crave visceral pleasure. A culinary journey awaits your senses: there is a Teppanyaki grill restaurant named FIRE to whisk you to Japan, while SPICE offers a fiery taste of Asia along with spectacular views over the vast Indian Ocean. You're sure to leave well-rested here as the award-winning Anantara overwater spa boasts world-class treatments that have been infused with the healing properties of indigenous plants. With an option to take your relaxation a step further, there's an authentic Ayurvedic head massage called Shirodhara on offer here, which is sure to leave your mind, body and soul feeling anew.



Three Bedroom Beach Pool Residence



Inside the Overwater villa



Stargazing at SKY bar



Underwater dining at SEA restaurant