

Lifestyle

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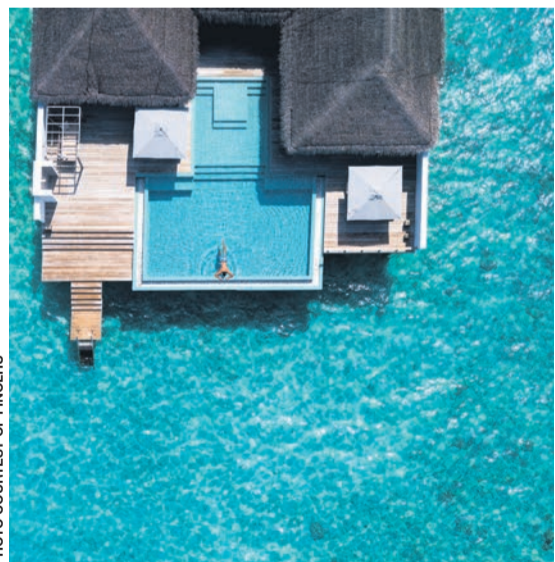


Maldives offers a slice of tropic paradise for all tastes

While the Maldives is usually considered ‘the trip of a lifetime’ that comes with a hefty price tag, the increasing number of resorts across the island country offers something for all budgets and tastes



Take a dip in the pristine waters of the Indian Ocean or relax in your infinity pool at Joali's water villas.



Finolhu's "Rockstar" suite boasts an impressive 460 square meters of living space as well as an 8-meter infinity pool.



An incredible view greets you as soon as you step off your seaplane when you arrive at the Mirihi.

Pristine waters and silky smooth beaches, the Maldives is like a scene straight from paradise.

CAN KAZANCIÖĞLU

» THERE is a reason the Maldives has come to be known as the ultimate tropic getaway: pristine beaches with silky smooth sand, clear and turquoise waters inhabited by vibrant sea life, palm trees rustling with gentle ocean breezes that keep you cool under the ever-present sun.

It truly feels like a heavenly place but for many, the price of admission to paradise was too much – at least it used to be. The Maldives, like many other tropical destinations, was as often associated with high costs as it was associated with beautiful beaches.

But today, the country has more than 100 resorts scattered across more than 1,200 islands that cater to all sorts of tastes and budgets, making the country much more accessible as a vacation destination.

Whether you are a newlywed couple looking for that perfect honeymoon destination with a focus on privacy or a well-to-do businessperson looking to get away in style from the chaotic life of a metropolis, the Maldives has it all.

THE LUXURIOUS

Apart from the sand and sea, the next thing that comes to mind when one thinks of the Maldives is luxury.

One such resort that makes you appreciate the finer details of such luxury is Joali.

Located on Raa Atoll to the northwest of Male, Joali never fails to impress from the moment you step off the seaplane.

Oozing with tasteful character, Joali is as luxurious as they come while steering away from over-the-top decor. And the reason is its meticulous attention to detail blended with masterful use of art.

The resort has a total of 73 villas, ranging from a respectable 100 square meters (1,076 square feet) to a whopping 500 square meters. And that's just the interior space. Since every villa has at least one pool – yes, some of them have two – the total space of some rooms can reach as high as 1,200 square meters.

Upon a closer look at the villas, it is clear that the designers behind the resort, Istanbul-based Autoban and Atölye4n as well as Japan's Studio Glitt, painstakingly went through every detail imaginable to make the whole resort come together.

But it's not just architecture and design that shows how much thought went into little details. Every guest will find a little cell phone waiting for them when they first enter their room, which will have just one contact saved: your personal butler, called "Jadugars."

Hospitality is the key to the Maldives experience for all resorts, not just Joali, and Joali doesn't disappoint when it comes to it. Headed by General Manager Enver Arslan, the staff at the resort will go above and beyond to make your stay a memorable experience.

Art also plays a huge part in the resort's character. Joali features more than a dozen artworks from artists from all around the world scattered across the island. Whether you are having lunch at one of the resort's restaurants or taking a stroll on one of the beaches, you are never too far from a beautiful piece.

Speaking of art, it's not just conventional art that goes on in Joali. There are a lot of culinary arts to be enjoyed, as well. The resort has several restaurants that all specialize in different cuisine. Whether it's an Italian pasta or some Southeast Asian dish you are craving, one of the restaurants ought to have it.

But the crown jewel of the culinary offerings of Joali is Saoko, a Japanese restaurant designed by world-renowned architect Noriyoshi Muramatsu offering the best of the best of what Japanese cuisine has to offer in a lounge with an incredible ocean view.

When it comes to sports activities, Joali offers a wide array of water sports, as well as excursions to take a closer look at the local sea life. There are also tennis and archery courses with a resident instructor who'll gladly show you the ropes.

If it's the Maldives experience with a luxurious yet elegant touch you are looking for, you can't go wrong with Joali. Winning the TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice "Best of the Best" award in 2020, it promises to be an unforgettable vacation.

THE UNIQUE

But what if you are looking for luxury with a unique twist? Perhaps you are a city dweller looking to simply disconnect and get in touch with nature; someone who prefers a much more intimate setting that helps you discover local aspects of the Maldives more. After all, when in Rome, do as the Romans do, as the saying goes.

Situated on South Ari Atoll, Mirihi is one of the smallest resorts in the Maldives. But what it lacks in size and grandeur, it more than makes up for with its unique approach.

You won't see any televisions in Mirihi, for example, nor motorized watersports or discos blaring loud music. The only time the serene silence is broken is with the arrival or departure of the seaplane every now and then.

That is because Mirihi focuses on offering an experience basked in tranquility.

With just 38 villas, it offers an intimate setting, one that is reinforced by a staff that strives to offer authentic Maldivian hospitality.

Speaking of rooms, most of the villas are quite quaint, with water villas measuring 55 square meters; yet, they never feel small because Mirihi's main focus is for its guests to spend as little time as possible indoors.

They want the guests to explore the beauty the island offers, both above and below the water.

"Around 50% of the beauty of the Maldives is above water. And the other 50% is underwater," says Mirihi's General Manager Mohamed Shareef. Reflecting that approach is the fact that most water villas are built on stilts above the island's turquoise lagoon with direct access to a bustling reef, which offers a great chance to snorkel.

And it's not just the sea Mirihi wants you to connect with. From the moment they set foot on the island, guests are expected to leave their shoes or slippers in their suitcases as the resort offers a completely barefoot experience. With even the floor in reception and restaurants covered in sand, shoes are not welcome on this island.

The resort's fine dining restaurant Muraka offers guests the chance to watch the mesmerizing colors of a tropic sunset and the occasional schools of vibrantly colored fish lazily swimming by as they enjoy a variety of world cuisines, from Wagyu beef to Maldivian lobster.

Apart from culinary activities, the resort provides a chance to go on several different sea adventures.

Hop on a boat that will take you to open waters for a chance to snorkel with the gentle giants of the oceans, whale sharks. You can also watch manta rays gracefully glide in the water if you happen to visit during their seasonal gathering.

If that sounds too intimidating, you can also opt for a calmer snorkeling experience in the nearby reefs and swim with playful turtles while discovering fish with hypnotizing colors.

And after all is said and done, there is nothing better than ending a day full of activities with a relaxing massage at a spa. The Duniye Spa located in the resort will help you relax with a variety of massages from East to West on offer.

Ranking as high as the seventh-best resort in the world at TripAdvisor in 2017, Mirihi and its staff excel at turning first-time visitors into repeat

customers. According to Shareef, the resort has some guests who have visited the island more than 20 times. With its motto being "as unique as you," Mirihi is sure to offer you a truly unique Maldivian experience.

THE CHIC

While most resorts use words like serenity or tranquility as they advertise their own version of the Maldives experience, there are some that also put emphasis on fun.

Located on the Baa Atoll to the northwest of Male, Finolhu resort specializes in putting a "playful twist" on luxury. Yes, you can still get the tranquil and laid-back vacation experience here as well, but it also offers unique and exciting opportunities to witness the true beauty of the Maldives.

Adopting turquoise like the waters it is surrounded by as its official color, the resort makes perfect use of vibrant hues. Each villa uses a different color scheme depending on its type and is furnished with stylish artwork or decorative pieces imported from all around the world.

Regarding accommodation, the resort has a whopping 125 villas, with their size ranging from 145 square meters to 460 square meters. And in line with most resorts, half of them have a pool for those who prefer to lazily bask in the dying light of the setting sun on a calmer body of water.

But the best the resort has to offer are the "Rockstar" suites. With 460 square meters of living and space and an impressive 8-meter-long infinity pool, the "Rockstar" villas offer great privacy and seclusion due to its location at the very end of the walkway for water villas. Oh, it also comes with its very own private buggy that looks like a classic car.

Stepping outside the rooms, the sea around the Finolhu is sublime, both above and below the water. As the resort stretches across four islands, it features a lagoon, which means swimming in smooth water.

Similar to Mirihi's whale shark seeker cruise, Finolhu has dolphin cruises five times a week where guests can watch the sea mammals playfully swim along the boat's bow.

For adrenaline seekers, Finolhu presents what might be the most expansive catalog of motorized watersports. Jetski, wakeboard, water ski, underwater scooter and even a water-propelled jet blade, you name it, the resort has it.

When it comes to culinary delights, guests can choose from four different restaurants offering cuisines from the world. The Beach Kitchen is where the buffet is, the Arabian Grill offers Levantine cuisine while Kanusan is the resort's award-winning fine dining restaurant.

The last one is the Crab Shack, which sits on another island that takes either a 20-minute stroll along the sandbank or a five-minute boat ride to get to. In this rustic restaurant, guests can enjoy a wide variety of food and drinks, but it's the night when this little shack shines. Come nightfall, it hosts events like "White Party" that resemble scenes from Ibiza or Mykonos.

And if you ever find yourself craving the rich coffee offerings of the city life you have escaped from, the resort has its own brewery called Milk Lab for your caffeine needs.

Perhaps the most special dining experience the resort offers is the beach bubble. An inflatable and transparent tent that lies on the most secluded part of the resort, the beach bubble resembles a giant balloon that couples can spend the night in. What makes it unique is the unparalleled stargazing opportunity it offers due to its transparent structure and the private breakfast and dinner offered to couples who are willing to spend extra.

If you are looking for a place in the Maldives that offers a wide range of activities with an energetic attitude, Finolhu will present you with both relaxing and exciting opportunities.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF FINOLHU

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