


Uncovering the Spa Paradise

Have your utmost indulgence right in the heart of Maldives

Words and Photography **Cecily Mabasa**





MALDIVES IS, AND WILL ALWAYS BE, MY OWN PERSONAL PARADISE. Nothing compares to the Maldivian islands—with clear cerulean waters, powder-soft sand, the richest marine life and the most indulgent spas in the world. There, the ultimate law is privacy and pampering. Once you land in your resort, you will never want to leave again. Here are a few of my favorite islands that boast the best reefs, over-the-top pampering, over-water villas and unparalleled personal services.

Maldives is home to gorgeous beach and spa resorts that embody the very definition of paradise

Taj Exotica Resort

Taj Exotica is located on the exotic Emboodhu Finolu Island, which was once known as the Three Coconut Island. Surrounded by crystal blue waters and a lush forest, the villas are rested over the lagoon and are built with top-quality natural wood finishes. The room's interiors are decorated in a native Maldivian aesthetic, with sun decks that include plunge pools, private spa areas, outdoor showers and sofa lounges. The food is fantastic. It's mostly Indian food, but there are also themed nights (one of the best Japanese meals I've had was in Taj Exotica).

A chat with the resident Ayurveda guru is one of the highlights of my visit. I had my chakras assessed in just over an hour. It's similar to a psychiatric session. He asked me questions and we went over certain topics. The assessment found that I had high levels of stress and that yoga would be a good solution for this. So I decided to bliss out on one of the spa's signature therapies: a yoga journey with Samattva Balance Ritual to a two-hour Vishrama Deep Muscular massage.

GREAT TO KNOW

Located in the Taj Exotica is Jiva Grande Spa, which offers authentic Indian treatments

You can also request for a beach dining setup at Taj Exotica



The villas at Cocoa Island resemble the boats used by locals



The most noteworthy reason to go to Taj Exotica is that it offers superb holistic wellness services

Cocoa Island

The villas here, which are inspired by *dhoni* boats (vessels used by locals), curve out from the island and are connected to the pristine white sands with wooden walkways built over the clear waters. The interiors are all white with wood accents. Imagine white cotton curtains dancing as a gentle breeze sweeps into the room. The rooms have their own decks, with outdoor showers and bathtubs. You can literally step out of the deck and snorkel right outside your villa. Cocoa Island has one of the best reefs in the world, so wherever you are, you can just jump right into the water to view and experience Maldivian marine life.

After a day of chilling out in my villa, I would end my day with a half-hour soak in the hydrotherapy pool, which a lot of resorts don't have. It's a good way to relax if you don't want an hour-long massage yet have your back muscles be relieved of tension. I followed it with an hour of Sunset Yoga at the resort's own yoga pavilion. Yoga sessions are offered twice a day.

Huvafen Fushi

Definitely not understated, each Huvafen Fushi's glass-bottomed villa houses a private deck that includes a swing and a Jacuzzi whirlpool bath. Champagne greets you as soon as you step into your villa, butlers bring you punch while you paddle and is customized music is played to suit your mood.

There are more than a handful of activities to do there that you probably won't have time to try all. There are guided snorkeling tours, diving sessions and even sunset or dolphin cruises. Every six in the evening, there's stingray feeding. A family of manta rays living nearby swim to the beachside to be fed.

My favorite activity is going to the Lime Spa, the first underwater spa in the world. Designed by Richard Hywel Evans, the spa is an architectural masterpiece in its own, but the treatments make the trip all the more worth it. Immediately, glass walls surrounded me as I stepped into the spa and through it, I could see the rich marine life of corals, fishes and even baby sharks.

GREAT FOR THE FAMILY

These resorts also offer activities that families can enjoy, including snorkeling, dolphin cruises, baby shark feeding, island hopping, boating, sailing and kayaking!

How to get there: Book through the luxury adventure specialist Sea to Summit Explorations! Visit <seatosummitadv.net>; email <ces@seatosummitadv.net>; phone (917)868 7971, (2)815 8233

Airfare: US\$1200 - 2500 (Approx. P48000 - P100000)

Resort Stay: US\$1000/night (Approx. P140000)

The villas at Hufaven Fushi are teeming with opulence and high-tech furnishing

Gili Lankanfushi is a romantic coral located in a secluded lagoon

TIP

A must-do in this resort is to have the Tibetan Singing Bowl Massage combined with seaweed based Ocean Therapy at Meera Spa

Gili Lankanfushi

As soon as you arrive in this resort, the butler will confiscate your shoes because of the resort's "no shoes, no news" policy, which is a solid reminder that you have just escaped the city life.

Gili Lankanfushi is definitely a good starting resort for first-time guests of Maldives. Gili carries a traditional Maldivian vibe, blending Asian traditions with the overall appeal of the resort. It is evident that the utmost care has been taken in developing the island with respect to its ecological balance.

I couldn't even bring myself to leave my villa. I just wanted to lounge in my hammock, have a soak in my tub, go snorkeling down my deck in search for aquatic creatures or simply take in the expansive view of the Indian Ocean at my deck swing. This is where I started my love affair with Maldives—and it definitely left a lasting mark in my well-travelled heart.



CECILY MABASA is the owner of Neo Day Spa and Sea to Summit Explorations Luxury Adventure Desk. Her passion is exploring new and remote destinations for half the year.