



# Notes from a very small island

The postage-stamp-sized Maldivian resort Huvafen Fushi is a blissfully peaceful aquatic sanctuary

Words Christopher Silvester

**AFTER A LENGTHY** flight via the Emirates, the last thing you want is another immediate flight to a far-flung atoll – and as Huvafen Fushi is part of South Malé Atoll, it's only 35 minutes by boat from Malé International.

A postage-stamp-sized resort, this is not for noisy young folk, as guests must be at least 21. Few choose to stay up late, but UMbar will happily keep mixing cocktails until you leave.

There are 44 rooms and pavilions in total. The De Luxe Beach Bungalows are perfect for those who wish to walk out of their bedroom and immediately feel the sand between their toes. For greater privacy, however, you should choose an over-water bungalow. These are designed in an egg shape, with Ocean Bungalows to one side and Lagoon Bungalows to the other. The Ocean Bungalows have the additional feature of a glass floor in the living room for viewing the aquatic life passing below. Of the three pavilions, Cube, with its open-plan living area, is best suited for group living.

The 800 square metre PlayPen is the Maldivian equivalent of a hotel penthouse suite, spacious Parisian attic or an Upper East Side loft. You arrive at the resort on board their 45 foot speedboat *Veloce*, which you can also rent for excursions, and enter the PlayPen through your own private courtyard. Upstairs is the inner PlayPen

Chamber, comprising an ocean-view master bedroom and playroom containing a large bath and with a private sauna and steam room. A balcony overlooks a black lava stone infinity pool, floodlit in burgundy as the sun sets. The PlayPen comes with its own *thakuru*, or butler, who lives in and is available around the clock.

One of the most peaceful spots on the island, Lonu Veyo, is a circular saltwater pool at the end of a pier, where you can float for hours in a cruciform position. There is room for two, but not more than that. On a patch of beach, Hamid, the resort's marine biologist and 'ray-whisperer', feeds stingrays pieces of tuna every evening, tickling the rays on their undersides, so they lie flat in the shallows, whereupon he inserts a morsel of fish just under the snout. The rays have been coming here for years now, and Hamid even has names for them all.

Hamid took me on a guided snorkel excursion along the reef to watch fish feeding on corals, algae, and other plant life. There were regal fin angelfish, Emperor angelfish, shabby parrotfish, green-face parrotfish, different varieties of butterflyfish, snappers, groupers, damselfish, oriental sweetlips, and many more. Your guide can bring along a special underwater camera to photograph you in action along with the fish.

The over-water pavilions hover on azure ocean



“PEARL IS THE MALDIVES' FIRST UNDER-WATER SPA

For a small island, there are plenty of dining options. At Celsius, which serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, offers Maldivian curries, while Forno, with its wood-fired oven, has artisanal pizza. For lunch, you might drop in on Raw Café, an intimate over-water space offering small plates of raw food. Feeling Koi, reached by a jetty, is an izakaya-style restaurant, specialising in 'Japanese tapas'. The island's most unique dining experience takes place in Vinum. Perfect for candlelit private dinners, this circular cellar is eight feet below ground level and is refreshingly cool. Its walls are lined with fine wines and the sommelier will recommend degustation menus or wine flights to accompany your own à la carte choice. Bear in mind that any alcohol imported into the Maldives, which is a strict Muslim country, incurs a hefty duty.

Huvafen Fushi boasts the first underwater spa in the Maldives, called Pearl. Gaze through your massage table into a patch of azure water and watch marine life swim nonchalantly below while you are gently pummeled – before chilling out with some herbal tea in an underwater relaxation room, rather like being in your own private aquarium, with fish stopping to gaze curiously at you. A signature massage, the Dhimaali, is a 90-minute scrub with island sand and salt which you then wash off in the lagoon.

Boat excursions include *Veloce* and *Silver Surf PVT* – a powerful, 54 foot, crewed Princess motoryacht that can accommodate up to 25 passengers seated, in case you have a group of wedding guests in tow. You can also rent the island's dhoni, a tri-masted, traditional Maldivian fishing vessel with lateen sails. She is 65 feet long and her crew is available on a 24-hour basis. Sleeping the night on board is the best way to experience a Maldivian sunset and sunrise. Dhonis once played a significant role in the world economy, since these vessels were used to export cowrie shells as ballast, which were then traded in China, India, and West Africa, where they were used as currency. For that reason, spending a night on a dhoni allows you to connect with the authentic cultural heritage of the Maldives. 📍

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