

“There is no reality except the one contained within us.
That’s why so many people live an unreal life. They
take images outside them and never allow the world
within them to assert itself.”

— Herman Hesse

(Swiss Novelist, Nobel Prize Winner for Literature, 1946)

a constellation of *heavenly* pursuits

by Sharon Lai



SIP sunset lounge at the W Retreat & Spa is a perfect setting for romantic moments...



Someone once said of an island beautiful beyond words: If God had wanted us to get a glimpse of the real paradise this has to be it, the closest we can ever get because the real thing is beyond our ability to even contemplate.

Many spots on the Maldives are close in character to that imaginary island. The white sandy beaches fringed by different hues of crystal clear ocean. Heavenly...perfect! Here you get to sleep with the stars above. The constant crash of the ocean interluded often by erratic whispers of the breeze, hums a soothing lullaby. Go on, make your own dream world, if you wish. Pretty soon, you will have to get back to the real world of hectic traffic and inevitable chaos.

If only we could make real what Herman Hesse said by internalizing what is imagined and then making it reside within us to be recalled at will when needed; with that within grasp, many will never have to suffer stress or be lonely again.

Geographically isolated, the Maldives are in a world of their own. Today, the Maldives have become a destination that host many splendid luxurious retreats that are the envy of those around the world. Many have yet to catch up with the celebrated barefoot luxuries that these islands are famous for.

Island-hopping is a must to get a real taste of the country. The spas are entirely a world of their own too. Spa-hopping is also an indulgence not to be missed! Top of the line luxuries mingle with the very best of health and beauty therapies to deliver promises of wellness and unbridled indulgence.

The endless blue of the tranquil sea and sky that merge as one would soothe weary souls. SpaAsia team went island-hopping to bring you closer to these ethereal isles of paradise. We share with you what we found...

W RETREAT & SPA

This is the W Hotel Group's first resort venture. Bringing the ultra chic, contemporary and vivacious style that W is famous for around the globe to retreat into an island resort. Here on this island of tranquillity a hip-and-happening lifestyle tries to merge with harmony of nature.

WHERE?

A castaway on the intimate Fesdu Island at the North Ari Atoll, it is only 25 minutes from the Malé airport by sea-plane.

WHAT?

The exterior resembles the traditional Maldivian village huts but the interiors are all W's. Vibrant and ultra-chic deco and innovative ambience rule.

MOODS

Contemporary, cool and stylish with dashes of sexiness that is hard to ignore. Just makes you want to move to its jazzy rhythm – being alive and in tune to dance to its every sexy groovy move. The sights and sounds of its vibrant colour and shapes turn the beat up but yet have the embrace of comfort in modern cutting-edge luxuries.

ACCOMMODATION

78 Retreats of 46 over-water Ocean Oasis, 28 two-tier Beach Oasis, 3 Seascape Escapes with two bedrooms and the ultimate retreat, the Ocean Haven with two bedrooms.

MALDIVIAN SOUL

The AWAY Spa embodies the traditional Dhow Maldivian boat, an allegorical recreation of embarking on a journey into the vast expanse as in the olden days. Coming in through the "Noguchi" bamboo tunnel, one enters the open-air reception and the floatation platform; where the overall architecture bears the shape and structure of a Dhow with elegant and vibrant sails. It signifies a transformation of journeying into the open blue expanse of the ocean. It is symbolic of the unshackling of the spirit, a quest for that untrammelled sense of freedom, something not just seafaring people can relate to.

SPA AWAY

The AWAY Spa indulges your every sense and sweeps you away from the world. Its surprisingly extensive menu offers everything under the sun and from the sea to appease even the most discerning of connoisseurs. The AWAY experience is all about healing, rejuvenating and pampering. AWAY journeys are signature rituals that are bent on seriously taking you on a journey to a place where nothing else matters. Highly recommended is the Jet AWAY – perfect for defogging the lingering residues of jet lag or post-party syndrome. The other is the Vibrant AWAY that sweeps away all sense-numbing feelings with its mind-clearing steam, zesty sea-salt glow scrub, Drift AWAY signature massage and a blissful bath.

AWAY celebrations are also their most celebrated rituals in honour of love and romance. The Aroma Wed-AWAY and Gods Wed-AWAY 5 hours post-nuptial packages are created to sweep any couples off



Beneath the dhow-inspired sunshade
of the AWAY Spa amidst the calm
turquoise sea and sun, let yourself drift away...

“That lightness of being, clarity of mind, rested soul that we long for is made available to guests almost effortlessly at the AWAY Spa. The concept is the perfect antidote to the endless complexity and confusion.

...the soothing rhythm of the waves and the dhows effortlessly sailing *away* represent freedom, lightness and limitlessness, symbolic of the journey, that of gently drifting *away* from stress, chaos, and worries, leaving all these behind and freely flowing, in sync again with the natural rhythm of life.

The pristine surroundings and luminosity gave me a renewed awareness of the importance of clarity and simplicity for one's well-being. I wanted to offer a spa experience with no staging, no overbuilt structure, allowing people to naturally open their mind and heart, embrace the vastness, fill themselves with the life force of the sun, the light, the great blue..."

— Farida Chettab Brouwer, Salamander Lifestyle Pte Ltd



A glorious view of the never-ending blue of the Indian Ocean from above...



At the AWAY Spa, the *Drift Away* massage movement mimics the soothing rhythm of the ocean waves as it lulls one to sleep



An intimate moment spent in togetherness on board the stateroom of the Four Seasons' Explorer as you go cruising by...

their feet into heavenly bliss! For the finale, a “share pleasure dining” at the floating platform comes with stunning view to complete the journey of sensual delight. Recommended for the perfect moment to make memorable memories!

SIGNATURE TREATMENT

The *Drift AWAY* signature massage is a must try! Its fluid rolling movement mimics the waves transporting the receiver into a zone of comforting security and the aroma of essential oils used in the massage is uplifting. Complementing this massage are the healing sounds of the waves and crystal vibrations at the start and end to sweep over your body and detach it from clinging to the tensions and troubles that reside within as you journey into blissful retreat. The name aptly describes the journey – Drift Away!

DID YOU KNOW?

The spa menu offerings are also available in-Retreat. Thanks to the Whatever, Whenever service philosophy!

DON'T MISS

Party the night away at the cool underground club lounge – 15BELOW. Famous guest DJs do their thing to move and shake “islanders” when the sun goes down. An extensive range of alcoholic beverages is available: vodka, liqueurs, wine and cocktails!

THE INDULGENCE

SIP, a sunset lounge that encourages you to laze snugly on big plush pillows and day-beds and drink in the breathtaking sunset...with a glass of champagne, if you wished. Kick off the evening dining with the Chef's NIBBLE@SIP of “raw”, and light appetizers before making your way to FISH for the finale of the dining experience. FISH is the W Maldives's signature seafood restaurant that serves out-of-the-ocean epicurean delights. Its freshest and finest delicacies are meant to please the tastebuds of even the most discerning.

EXCLUSIVITY

FIRE offers a unique al fresco BBQ buffet dining with a rustic twist. It is all about fabulous food and how you would like your fresh meat or seafood done. The chefs are ever ready to meet the challenge. Definitely not for the vegetarians!

WHAT WE LIKE

The signature W service experience – Whatever & Whenever you want! That is service at your beck and call...

DIRTY SECRETS

Can't really decide to dance the night away or just lie around staring at the starry night sky!

FOUR SEASONS RESORT MALDIVES AT KUDA HURAA

This beautiful resort has been re-opened recently to unveil a much more exceptional Four Seasons experience. It still proudly boasts its pride and joy, the first Island Spa!

WHERE?

Secluded on a private island in the North Malé Atoll. It is 25 minutes by speedboat from the Malé International Airport.

WHAT?

A private island resort that reflects elements of a traditional Maldivian village. It is an island retreat that is beautifully suited for family retreats and couples.

MOODS

The Maldivian lifestyle is infused into every corner of this resort. The rusticity of living on an island coupled with modern tropical comforts set the moods for an intimate experience. The whole resort resembles a traditional village and exudes a Maldivian way of life. All these come with touches of the world-class Four Seasons luxury and comfort of course!

ACCOMMODATION

Its 96 thatched beach and water bungalows are made up to reflect a modern tropical ambience. Mostly timber and thatched with the signatory Maldivian roof, all are the collective result of superb traditional craftsmanship. On land there are 25 Beach Pavilions with pool, 32 Beach Bungalows with pool and the ultimate Royal Beach Villa. Over water there are 32 Water Bungalows, 4 Navaranna Water Bungalows and 2 Two-bedroom Water Bungalows.

SPA AWAY

Secluded on its own private island, this oasis seems to hold the secret to harmonious balance. This Island Spa sanctuary pays tribute to the indigenous traditions of its host island and the healing spirit of the ocean. So private it is that a dhoni (native Maldivian boat) is needed to transport you over to the spa!

MALDIVIAN SOUL

The *Maldivian Iruvai* on its spa menu pays tribute to the host land. Experience its calming herbal infused steam. Next comes the therapeutic warm herbal oil massage which is followed by a Kela Gana body scrub. Cleanse in a Maldivian monsoon experience – a soothing, cascade of gentle stream and complete the journey with a luxurious soak of Rose & Cardamon herbal tisane.

SIGNATURE TREATMENT

The perfect must-try signature treatment here must be the Island Spa Rituals of *Sea Escape*! Begin with an oceanic bath. Then an invigorating sea salt scrub treasures from the ocean follows. Next comes the mineral enriched sea body mask and the finale is the Kuda Huraa massage. This signature massage combines the very best of Thai pressure point, Filipino hilot and Malaysian urut to ease away those stubborn and deep-seated aches and tensions.



There is a sense of ethereal peace as one embarks on a yoga ritual at the Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa during the break of dawn... the dawn of a new beginning.

Unleash your soulful creativity as you paint your heart away in the AWAY Spa's Creative Expression.



Some quiet time of sun worshipping and indulgence in the sun lounges at the Royal Beach Villa at Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa.

EXCLUSIVITY

The ultimate Four Seasons Maldivian experience comes in the form of its own luxurious cruising catamaran. Here is a chance to indulge in and learn more intimately the way of life of the Maldivians. Island hop to a remote island, have a picnic there, discover remote villagers or ancient sites, dive or snorkel in unspoilt waters, pamper with a spa treatment on board with the resident therapist or anywhere your fancy takes you. Or retreat to the luxurious comfort of the stateroom or suite. Sail away to a whole new experience and indulgences... Highly recommended for honeymooners!

DON'T MISS

Four Seasons offers its 'Land & Sea' packages that allow guests at its Resorts to combine island stay with a trip on board the Explorer. The best of both worlds!

WHAT WE LIKE

The exotic collection of colourful lamps from around the globe at the reception. A definite curio element that is feast for the eyes!

DIRTY SECRETS

The legendary attentiveness and dedicated service of the Four Seasons combined with the genuine warmth of the Maldivian win our hearts hands down! The always around and ever-willing staff seem to know what you need before you even wished for it! You may feel like you may want to take them home with you!

HUVAFEN FUSHI

Dreams are made of these...

WHERE?

In North Malé Atoll, 30 minutes by speedboat from Malé International Airport.

WHAT?

The passion and beauty of the ocean translated permeates every corner and concept of this chic island resort. Imagine an ocean paradise with all the hues of ocean treasures and Huvafen Fushi comes to mind!

MOODS

It seems to rise like a dream from somewhere beautiful in the ocean...

ACCOMMODATION

43 'naturally modern' and stylish but yet has all the comforts of home and luxury. Ultra contemporary and cutting-edge in its living style. It comprises of 8 Beach Bungalows, 8 Deluxe Beach Bungalows, a Beach Pavilion with private pool, 12 Lagoon Bungalows, 12 Ocean Bungalows and 2 Ocean Pavilions with private pool. All bungalows come with their own plunge pool.

EXCLUSIVITY

"Lonu Veyo" here refers to the floatation pool that contains 10 times more minerals and salts than the Ocean. In the Dhivehi language, it means "Bathing Place". Due to its high mineral content, the soak here is highly therapeutic and aids in the healing process for skin conditions at a much faster rate. It is also good for aching muscles and joint pains or swellings.

MALDIVIAN SOUL

The Maldivian Monsoon Ritual is an indigenously Maldivian folk therapy inspired by the Beysverin (Maldivian medicine people). It begins with a dip in the Lonu Veyo. A traditional diagnosis to determine which monsoon type is suitable – hot or cold – is carried out. The most suitable monsoon oil is then also selected. A traditional Maldivian massage follows next. It preludes with a sand poultice enriched with mineral-rich water from the Indian Ocean. This is steamed and pressed all over the body for relief. The massage next is uniquely Maldivian using selected monsoon local herbal oil. A steam-bath follows to allow better penetration of the essence of the herbs and then a final shower.

In order to retain the authentic nature of the Maldivian therapy ritual, Aquum Spa has sought the counsel of Idhrees Be, a traditional Beysverin from the outer northern atolls in the development of all its Maldivian spa rituals.

SPA AWAY

Its Aquum Spa is conceptualized with the ocean at its heart. Most of its menu is incorporated with the well-known Elemis product range. It is also home to the world's first underwater spa.

SIGNATURE TREATMENT

Quintessential AQUUM is the first signature treatment created for the underwater spa. Rituals are created to capture the surrounding therapeutic beauty of the marine world. Let the creatures of the undersea be your companions as you partake of the rituals. Starting off with Yoga and meditation surrounded by the Indian Ocean. This can help you focus and then slide into a state of tranquillity. The Indian head massage follows. Next comes a journey of massages. From the signature massage incorporating chakra breathing to traditional Thai techniques to finally the traditional Maldivian massage. At the end of it, peace is all that flows through you!

DON'T MISS

The stunning view from the relaxation lounge of the spa on the top floor. A sight to behold!

WHAT WE LIKE

The latest wellness tool to join its extensive spa menu is the *Haemaview* or better known as live blood analysis. It is a form of live blood screening that allows you to see your blood under a microscope that is then transmitted onto a screen. During this analysis, it helps identify any risk factor that may be affecting the blood and overall health. It is then interpreted to help identify certain nutritional deficiencies and lifestyle risks. This offers a more holistic and wellness-oriented guidance to achieve

a much more realistic approach. It is about making little changes in your lifestyle that can bring long-term benefits. The best part comes not from the machine but from the person behind it – Naomi Quarrell. The angelic Naomi has the presence that puts anyone at ease while she encourages the emotional and spiritual side of you to come out into the open. Holding formal qualifications in Naturopathy, Remedial Massage, Nutrition, Iridology and Herbal Medicine, she comes highly recommended.

DID YOU KNOW?

The award-winning maritime company, AS Marine was selected to build Huvafen Fushi's new 70ft yacht. Scheduled to dock this November, this vessel will unfurl a cool, state-of-the-art features and all the ultimate luxuries that you could probably think of to have on board!

DIRTY SECRETS

Leaving this paradise to get back to reality is one of the hardest things to do...

ONE&ONLY AT REETHI RAH

Since its opening in May 2005, it is fast becoming one of the most glamorous and glitzy resort in Maldives...

WHERE?

On one of the biggest island resorts in Maldives where a spectacular coastline of 12 beaches on the North Malé Atoll can be found. About 50 minute away from the Malé International Airport – if you take their 55-foot luxury yacht.

WHAT?

The arrival of this glamorous resort raises the luxury level in Maldives a notch higher. Reethi Rah according to the Dhivehi tongue means 'Beautiful Island' and it sums up precisely what it is – a tropical paradise on earth! Most of its clientele are global citizens – international celebrities and royalties. This is the playground of the rich and famous.

MOODS

Sleek and sophisticated and complemented by the spirit of peace and beauty of the island. Generous space and freedom await. Looking at the expanse of entire island resort, one may want to call it a kingdom of tropical paradise. Here is a place where one could really seek out the One&Only Moments...

ACCOMMODATION

It is an all-villa resort – 130 in all – designed by world-famous Jean Michel Gathy. There are two choices of abode, on land in the Beach Villas or over water in the Water Villas. One thing is for sure about these villas...they are dedicatedly created to give a generous expanse of space accentuated by its signature high cathedral ceilings to



Indulge in the Ice Room at Degrees, Aquum Spa before heading out on a spa journey...



A One&Only moment at Reethi Rah with the unique over-water decks at the water villas.

give a sense of soaring freedom. Each villa is discreetly spaced away from the other to give residents intimate privacy – not customarily catered for elsewhere. The villas are known to be one of the largest in the world!

[MALDIVIAN SOUL](#)

Try sandbank dining. A Maldivian specialty that delivers true deserted island feel and taste!

[SPA AWAY](#)

One&Only Spa by ESPA says it all. For any spa connoisseur ESPA always sets the benchmark and is on top of everything spa. One would come to expect the very best from them and as always they deliver what they promise – the best in holistic well-being. It inspires a personal wellness journey through the Specialist Lifestyle Consultant. Its vision is dedicatedly one of “Vision of Wellness”.

[SIGNATURE TREATMENT](#)

Ask for its ESPA personal Lifestyle and Wellness Journeys. Through the guidance of Specialist Lifestyle Consultants, you will get a personal lifestyle and wellness programme based on an integration of ESPA treatments, fitness activities with nutritional programmes to inspire you to embark on a lifestyle change in pursuit of well-being.

[DON'T MISS](#)

Inhale, explore and indulge in the generosity of its space and freedom...of its accommodation and the resort itself!

[EXCLUSIVITY](#)

World-renowned French podiatrist, Bastien Gonzalez has his own Podiatry and Pedicure Clinic here. Famed for using cutting edge technology and magical holistic touch, he has wooed many celebrities and cosmopolitan clientele from afar. Bastien has been elevated to the status of ‘foot virtuoso’ by happy clients.

[DID YOU KNOW?](#)

Also on this resort is an orchid garden masterminded by floral guru, Stephen Woodhams with over eight species and 2,600 varieties of orchids. Orchid, the symbol of eternal elegance is also the signature flower for this resort.

[WHAT WE LIKE](#)

Fanditha promises a magical outdoor dining of exotic enchantment with a speciality in Middle Eastern cuisine. Divan-bolsters, Arabian carpets, chill-out hammocks, day beds with giant cushions, Arabian tents, crystal chandeliers, magical lamps set the sensual exotic mood that makes it all so surreal. Fanditha lives up to its name of being magical. Its aura gives the glimpse of the old forgotten mystery of the Maldives.

[DIRTY SECRETS](#)

You might get lost in a resort of such proportion! One of the few known resorts where you might need a map to move around...

Moments of bliss in the healing and pampering hands of an Aquum Spa therapist.



At the Huvafen Fushi – up for a game anyone?



Lonu Veyo, known as the “Bathing Place” to the Maldivians has ten times more minerals and salts than the Ocean. A dip in here is believed to aid in the healing process and soak away all aches and stresses.

SONEVA GILI RESORT

WHERE?

Scattered and secluded in Lankanfushi Island, North Malé Atoll... more so inhabiting the lagoon itself. It is only 15 minutes away by speedboat from Malé.

WHAT?

If there can exist simplistic sophistication in rustic luxury, this is it. ‘Intelligent Luxury’ is served here and it is of the highest standard in line with Soneva’s philosophy. Few who have been cast away here would want to be rescued!

MOODS

Entering the domain of this retreat is like being transported to a different time. The atmosphere seeks to enliven the senses. Everything about this place promotes a sense of belonging with nature. The rustic mood and feel of the ambience brings out the very best of the place and you, hopefully.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is freestanding over water. Freedom and privacy are exclusive yours. The 29 Soneva Gili Villa Suites, 8 Soneva Gili Residences and 7 Soneva Suites, 8 Soneva Gili Crusoe residences plus the ultimate Private Reserve seem to come out straight from a Robinson Crusoe fantasy. The seven Crusoe Residences brings the concept of “Do Not Disturb” to an elevated level! Each is totally isolated, out on its own and accessible only by its own private rowing boat. Room service comes in a speedboat! All the interior features are crafted from eco-friendly sources to create an all-round environment-friendly ambience.

SPA AWAY

The globally-renowned Six Senses Spa meets every spa-goer’s demand, even the most discerning of spa-goers.

MALDIVIAN SOUL

Try their Maldivian sand-massage as a local spa delicacy for a more local encounter.

DON’T MISS

Hide away in this haven and perfect the art of doing absolutely nothing. Learn to just be! There is no better place than here and now...

WHAT WE LIKE

Walking around without shoes, barefoot!

DIRTY SECRETS

There are sharks albeit small ones swimming and circling around the stilts below the Over Water Bar. You could either think, “Shark’s fin soup” or “Please don’t let me drop anything below!”. Both are comments not so nice to the sharks!



ISLAND DIRECTORY

- Anantara Resort Maldives
www.anantara.com
- Banyan Tree Maldives Vabbinfaru
www.banyantree.com
- Club Med Kanifinolhu
www.clubmed.com
- Cocoa Island
www.cocoaisland.com.bz
- Coconut Spa
www.coconutspa.com
- Dhoni Mighili
www.dhonimighili.com
- Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa
- Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru.
www.fourseasons.com/maldives
- Hilton Maldives Resort & Spa Rangali Island
www.hilton.com/worldwideresorts
- Huvafen Fushi
www.peraquum.com
- One&Only at Reethi Rah
- One&Only Kanuhura
www.oneandonlyresorts.com
- Soneva Fushi Resort
www.six-senses.com/soneva-fushi
- Soneva Gili Resort
www.six-senses.com/soneva-gili
- Taj Coral Reef
- Taj Exotica Resort & Spa
www.tajhotels.com
- W Retreat & Spa
www.whotels.com/maldives



Image from Hilton Maldives Resort & Spa



Image from cocoa island



a quick guide to *Island-Hopping*

COCOA ISLAND

WHERE?

Snugly parked in Makunufushi, a private island in the South Malé Atoll. It is a 40-minute speedboat ride from the Malé International Airport. Cocoa Island lies in the quiet atoll. Here the stillness reveals all that is compelling about nature and the underwater world, the way the Creator intended it to be.

WHAT?

Quiet and stillness are the essence of this place. Powdery white sand on the beach stretches on and on. Enveloped by the stillness of the lagoon, sparkling clear waters of the ocean, this place is calmness defined. Accommodation is inspired by and resembles the dhoni, the traditional sailing Maldivian boat. There are also six luxurious villas. The charming dhoni living units are adjoined by wooden walkways over the clear waters. Being the Maldivian outpost for the happening COMO Hotels & Resorts, it promises innovative and sophisticated decor and style which are further complemented by COMO's well-known attention to finer details. Comfort and luxuries are top of the line. Every need and fancy is nurtured and catered for as the well-being of guest is top priority. The COMO Shambhala Retreat has an extensive holistic spa menu, healthy cuisine in the flavour of Southern India and Yoga on call.

DID YOU KNOW?

That to the west of this property is the priceless Kandooma Channel, cited to be one of the best dive sites in Maldives.

TAJ EXOTICA RESORT & SPA

WHERE?

Home is a tropical haven endearingly known as 'Three Coconut Island' or Emboodhu Finolhu Island in the middle of one of the largest lagoons in the Maldives. Closest to the Malé International Airport, it is just 15 minutes away by private luxury speedboat.

WHAT?

It houses 62 self-contained intimately private villas all bedecked in legendary Taj luxury which has been reinterpreted here at this Maldivian destination. The outcome is a tropical island haven in the making. Every detail is made to bring its inhabitants into a closer communion with nature.

Its jewel among the lagoon is The Rehendhi Presidential Suite. Living room, two bedrooms with balcony, glassed bathroom with infinite ocean view, private spa treatment room, freshwater pool over the lagoon, private sundeck, two salas... and what else? Need one ask for more?

A paradise will never be without its own spa. Here, the Jiva Grande Spa reigns in its own private spa island sanctuary. A journey for the well-being of body, mind and soul begins here through holistic Indian therapies and rituals.

Some of its more exquisite features include the unique Royal Indian Mud & Bathing Pavilion, semi-outdoor suite with luxury Hammam and a special Ayurveda Sanctuary Pavilion. A resident Ayurvedic physician is on call in this sanctuary pavilion to advise on age-old therapies and rituals when needed.

DID YOU KNOW?

There is such a thing called Private Island Dining! All you need to do is just close your eyes (or have them open wide) point to a spot on the island and voila... a perfect dining experience will be set for you!

CLUB MED KANI

WHERE?

This Club Med's flagship resort in the Maldives is located on the island of Kanifinholu. From the air, the resort resembles a palm tree!

WHAT?

Where the sky and sea meet on this haven is where adventure-lovers find happiness. With beauty unspoilt, it is priceless and unforgettable to be here in this garden-island. Lovers and paradise seekers alike converge on this new and chic, ultra-cool haven. It is also adding a touch of romanticism to cater to increasing number of sophisticated traveller who make a beeline for this island haven.

This Club Med Village has 238 Polynesian-inspired rooms including the luxurious Beach Bungalows and new Lagoon Suites. Each of these has all the modern comforts of home. These latest addition – 73 Lagoon Suites – offers a closer reach to nature and the compelling Indian Ocean. Each of them opens up directly to the ocean. A most intimate escape in seclusion... As for a more indulging escape of the senses, head towards Club Med Spa Village. Here, the art and rites of self-indulgence can be sampled! The easing and also re-awakening of the senses is achieved through a world of Asian therapies, wellness, pampering and spa beauty treatments.

DID YOU KNOW?

Romance is everywhere here... moonlight walks, candlelight dinner, intimate havens to retreat to, romantic dip, starlight gazing, shared adventures... all these that put you in the mood. Sum it all together and it makes a beautiful place for honeymooners! Calling all honeymooners or those hopelessly in love... Club Med Kani in tribute and celebration to romance, has put together a Suite Dreams Honeymoon Package. It offers newlyweds over USD500 worth of complimentary services per couple! Romance does pay!

HILTON MALDIVES RESORT & SPA

WHERE?

In the South Ari Atoll, sited about a 30-minute seaplane flight from Malé. It is truly an ocean wonderland where you may want to really live your fantasy!

WHAT?

It has all the trappings of a seascape fantasy island – sensual and sophisticated in a barefoot luxury sort of way. Three distinctly unique experiences await you on two islands within a resort. It is also the proud owner of the world’s only all-glass Ithaa Undersea Restaurant and a destination spa retreat. It has a substantial collection of living accommodation – 50 luxuriously endowed Water Villas on Rangali Island, 79 exotic Beach Villas and 21 stunning spa water villas on the Rangalifinolhu Island. This would make Hilton Maldives the first resort to ever have two spa ventures within a destination. The Spa Retreat on the main island has over-water Spa Villas and a Spa.

Over at Rangali Island, the Over-Water Spa has four breathtaking glass-floor treatment rooms that allow the wonders of the coral reef and marine life below to be brought to you as you drift away under the expert hands of your spa therapist. The Spa worlds here give the ideals of its “resort within a resort”. Retreating into these spas bring you into a different out-of-this-world dimension. Taking dining experience seriously, it has the widest choice of world-class dining in the country – seven restaurants and three bars.

DID YOU KNOW?

When it comes to ‘Renewal of Love’ or nuptial ceremonies, this fantasyland offers the widest and most romantic choices around the region. Beach weddings at sunset, love ceremony on the wedding pavilion, underwater wedding in the bosom of the ocean, undersea

wedding at Ithaa Restaurant, wedding on board a yacht at sunset – name your fancy and you will have it!

**BANYAN TREE MALDIVES
VABBINFARU**

WHERE?

Nestled on the island of Vabbinfaru in the North Malé Atoll, it is just 25 minutes by speedboat from the Malé International Airport.

WHAT?

Cast away in a forgotten dream of a paradise that appears like a whisper. It is secluded with lavishly decorated villas that give a sense of hideaway with style. Plush comfort with a surrounding priceless panorama makes the living experience here much more like a dream. Every feature is designed to allow a playful participation with the interplay of nature – sunrise to sunset, the changing hues of the ocean as they sparkle and shimmer, the glittering stars (and if you are lucky, catch a glimpse of a shooting star that streaks across the dark expanse a billion miles away), and if you are in the mood, hear the raspy voice of the ocean breeze as it whispers words of love into your ears. For the most romantic at heart, ask for their unique Sandbank dining. Let your imagination run wild as they whisk you away by speedboat to your own sandbank for a most intimate and romantic dining experience. Don’t forget the heavenly indulgences that are known worldwide of their Banyan Tree Spa.

Speak Dhiveli

The Dhiveli language is believed to be Indo-European in origins. The written language uses the Arabic script because of the Islamic influence that has dominated life on this island for the past 700 years.

A few useful phrases (Romanised for easy pronunciation) will help you get a long way on this island of friendly people.

How are you? *Haalu Kihinei*

Good *Rangalhu* or *Baraabar*

Thank You *Shukuriiyyaa*

You are welcome *Marhabaa*

Goodbye *Vakivelanu*

on the pulse

FOUR SEASONS RESORT MALDIVES AT LANDAA GIRAAVARU

The opening of this much anticipated hideaway is scheduled for November 2006. Its 102-villa resort are crafted out of nature and hidden in isolated seclusion so that the untouched wilderness of the Landaa Giraavaru Island in Baa Atoll may be embraced in total by guests. Stay tuned for its Landaa Spa and Ayurvedic Retreat that have been put together with passion and love.

ANANTARA RESORT MALDIVES

Anantara is making its debut away from Thai soil here. Just recently arrived in South Malé Atoll, this boutique resort is a constellation of beachfront villas, over-water suites and over-water pool suites in the tradition of Anantara.

It offers all the tropical island moments of a lifetime the Anantara way. Rediscover the art of holistic relaxation as you indulge in whatever takes your fancy at the Anantara Spa. The Anantara touch awaits you in the Maldives.



must do list! Visiting the Maldives without trying out at least one of these is almost sinful!

WATER SPORTS

Needless to say all resorts provide an extensive selection of water sports. The most popular ones are snorkelling, windsurfing, sailing, water-skiing and kayaking.

SURFING


Surfing has become one hot sport recently. Quite a few surf breaks are popular and documented by surf enthusiasts. The annual surf event O’Neill Deep Blue Contest has made Maldives a surfing destination in its own right.

DIVING

Diving in the Maldives is known as among the best in the world. Its compelling and unique marine life makes it the greatest dive destinations. Numerous dive sites are everywhere, thousands still to be explored. Each dive site has its own charm and characteristics in form, fauna and flora, elements that moulds them and the numerous variation of marine life. All resorts in Maldives provide excellent diving facilities.

ISLAND HOPPING

Almost all resorts provide their own excursion programmes. Scheduled or “tailor-made”, these excursions are the most pleasurable and surest way of getting to know Maldives. Island hopping after all is part of the Maldivian way of life!



Many a nation's history is riddled with half-truths, legends and fiction. That of the Maldives is no different with plenty of gaps still waiting to be filled.



filling in the gaps

by Sharon Lai

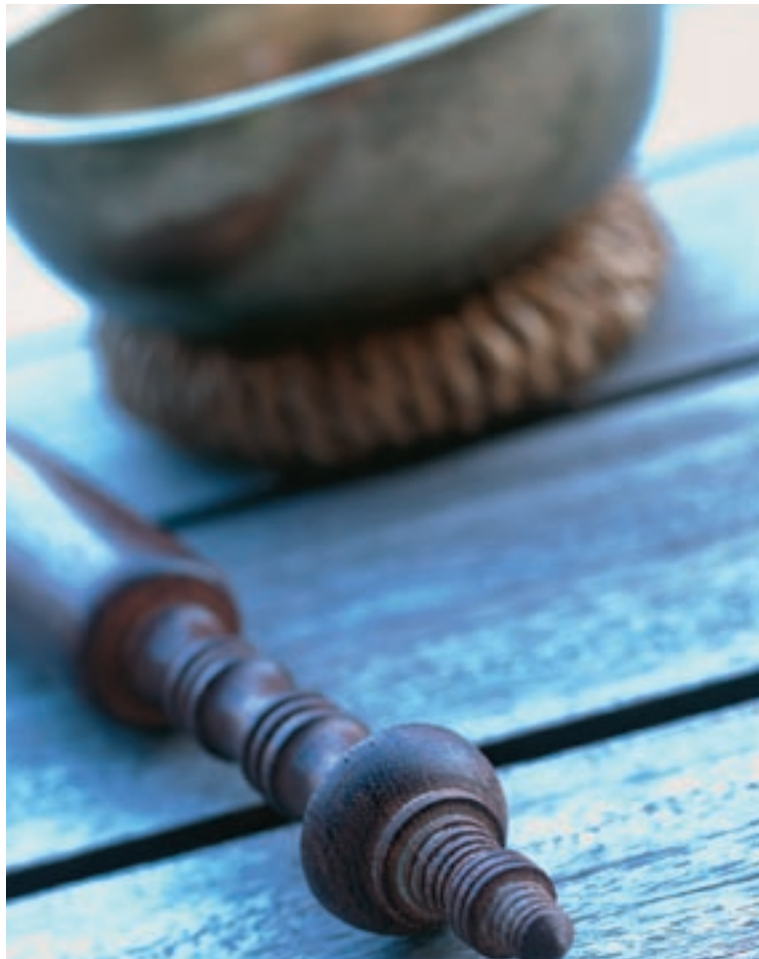
As our plane circled the island before landing on Malé Airport, a thought sneaked into my mind: “How did these people end up here on these tiny isles surrounded by innumerable coral reefs, lagoons, tiny isles and an endless expanse of ocean? How does one eke out a living in this place?”

Maldives' 1,190 islands mesmerize all into their embrace. This Muslim nation made up of a constellation of isles offers everything under the sun for sojourners and paradise-seekers.

The Maldivians refer to their own 'island kingdom' as “Dhivehi Raajje” which means the same. 'Maldives' on the other hand may have been derived from the Sanskrit word 'maladvipa' meaning 'garland of islands'. Quite befittingly, considering how the 26 atolls are arranged – in a double chain resembling a *haar*, the traditional Indian welcoming garland.

Besides being a haven for paradise-seekers, the Maldives has a wealth of natural treasures and a colourful clash of cultures. Peace and tranquillity reign in these islands that stand atop a volcanic that rose from the ocean floor millions of years ago.

The history of these islands are still unclear. Myths and legends abound and are more romantic. A distant folklore tells of a strange sea-going race of giants as being the first inhabitants of these islands. Legend has it that the 'Redin' were light-skinned, red-haired superhuman giants who worshipped the sun. They had navigated southwards following the North Star and built colossal monuments where they settled. As mysteriously as they had appeared, these giants disappeared.



Another legend tells of a group of people called the Dheyvis who came before the Redins. They were led by Sawamia, a religious man from India. Archaeological evidence of a Hindu past can be found all over. Early Maldivians were believed to have hailed from South India and what is present-day Sri Lanka.

But recent discoveries point to a more complex past. Evidence suggests a possible link to the pre-Buddhist civilization in Sri Lanka and the Aryans from Northwest India. Coincidentally, the “Giraavaru” people claim themselves to be the aborigines, and descendants of the Tamils. Whatever the truth is, we may never really know. Records are skimpy. What is known is that the various physical types in Maldives are the result of a diverse cultural mix with people arriving independently of each other through time. Later, Arabs, Africans, Malays, and Indonesians were added into the melting pot.

Although recorded Maldivian history only began from the time of Islam in the twelfth century, quite a few literary works and archaeological remains have shed more light on a much earlier time. This was because the Maldives were a convenient stopover point for many sea-faring civilizations that ruled the high seas long before the Europeans.

Its strategic point in the Indian Ocean would have attracted many callers. The Egyptians, for example were already criss-crossing the high seas in search of valuable commodities such as cowrie shells, ambergris, turtle shells and coir rope long before the others. The Chinese, Greeks, Romans, and the Sinhalese must have sailed through these islands over the centuries and left their mark.

Facts about the Maldives from before Islam remain unclear. One tale tells of a dynasty that ruled over these islands. The founder of this royal dynasty shows a connection to Sri Lanka and Buddhist dominance at one time. From this royal bloodline, the descendants of the four Buddhist kings ruled the Maldives before Islam.

Writings on the copper plates, *Isdhoo Loamaafaanu*, commissioned in 1194 AD by a Muslim king shows names of rulers of the Buddhist Themugee Dynasty as well as customs and practices and the judicial system of that time.

H.C.P Bell, a British civil servant was the first to explore the pre-Islamic origins in the Maldives, especially the “pre-existence of Buddhism in the archipelago”. In his

quest during the early 1920s, he discovered many archaeological sites in the atolls. Structures of large rounded mounds of coral stone and rubble took prominence. “Hawittas” as they are locally known, are believed to be the remains of ancient stupas, the likes of the Buddhist pagoda temples in Sri Lanka.

While excavating around the *hawittas*, they found many Buddhist and Hindu statues. Curiously enough, the locals believed that these *hawittas* were built by the Redins though none knew who they really were. But whoever they were that built these, one thing was certain – a lot of dedication, skill and efforts went into building these monuments.

In order to learn more about his own nation, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in the early 1980s engaged the services of famed Norwegian explorer, Thor Heyerdahl to explore the archaeological sites recorded by Bell. Here, Thor thought he had found a lead to the mythical ‘Redins’. He discovered some superb craftsmanship known only to a few pre-European civilizations. Walls of expertly cut and dressed stones used in sunken ceremonial bath fitted so precisely that nothing could slide between them, testifying to the high-level of craftsmanship and skills of the artisans, and also their level of scientific and engineering knowledge.

It is also intriguing that the Maldives have remained an Islamic nation for over seven centuries despite the various competing powers that fought for possession – the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British had major interests in the region at one time or another throughout the last five centuries.

According to a native legend, an Arab converted the Theemugee Buddhist king, Maha Kaliminja, to Islam. This Arab, Abu al-Barakat, had helped to chase the demon-god “Rannamaari” who had been demanding virgin sacrifices every full moon. Abu chased away the monster by reading the Al-Quran all night long. This won him the gratitude and admiration of the Maldivians. Greatly impressed, the king converted the whole nation to Islam.

However, there is also a political view that suggests the conversion was a shrewd political gambit with the view of securing support of powerful Islamic neighbours so that a Buddhist Sri Lanka could be held at bay.

The Maldives gained her independence on 26 July 1965. Most of its history and artefact before Islam were lost in line with the conservative Islamic belief that those buried would be better off left forgotten. But early doctrines or literary references give a substantial glimpse into the ancient past. Now more Maldivian historians, encouraged by the people have begun to look into the origins and history of the nation before Islam. This would help create a greater understanding of their country. Although the Maldives have a brief official history, the people can now take pride in the fact that the real history of their country could be as old as that of their Indian neighbour’s. 