

Family matters

A getaway to the Maldives with her pre-teen daughter provides Eddi Fiegel with a bonding experience during a time of grief

Finolhu's main pool and sandbank

PICTURE: Georg Roake

"I'm so excited, I could fly through the roof!" said my 12-year-old daughter Georgie as she counted down the days to our Maldives visit. She'd spent hours watching YouTube videos of the overwater villa we were due to be staying in at Finolhu, A Seaside Collection Resort, on the pristine Baa Atoll – a Unesco Biosphere Reserve home to 250 types of coral and 1,200 species of fish.

If that wasn't exciting enough, I also told her about Finolhu's new Teen Hut, a two-storey haven for 12 to 17-year-olds, where there would be everything from tie-dyeing, cookery classes and ceramics to DJ sessions, dance, football, golf and movie nights. Kids' clubs in the Maldives have historically catered for younger children well, with an endless array of activities, but it's less common to have so many facilities geared towards teens.

Then, the morning before we were due to travel I got a call from my sister: our mum had passed away. Should we still go, I wondered. It took me a moment or two to decide – but my mum had always encouraged me to

embrace the opportunities life brings, and so that was what I was going to do.

The next 24 hours passed in a blur, but as our seaplane descended and I glimpsed the soft ribbon of white sand and palm trees below, I began to feel a strangely surreal glimmer of wonder.

ARRIVE IN STYLE

As we walked along the wooden jetty towards the resort, I could feel the sun's warmth on my arms. Before I knew it, our personal butler Aftaah was whisking us off in a golf buggy through Finolhu's lush network of sandy paths – each lined with a canopy of overhanging palms, bougainvillea and hibiscus – to our overwater villa.

With its panoramic ocean view, private infinity pool and a ladder giving us direct access to the sea, the villa more than lived up to the promise of those YouTube videos. The stylish mix of wicker lampshades, turquoise mosaics and whitewashed walls felt like Ibiza reimagined in the tropics. ➤

DESTINATIONS

FAMILY HOLIDAYS | MALDIVES



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Finolhu's Two-Bedroom Water Villa with Pool; Crab Shack; Teen Hut; writer Eddi with 12-year-old daughter Georgie PICTURES: Georg Roske



ASK THE expert



Emily Rutter,
Indian Ocean
product
manager,
Inspiring
Travel

"The Maldives is great for families with children of all ages – and there is so much to entertain teenagers as well. All-inclusive resorts are becoming more popular, largely due to the quality improving. Gone are the days of a one-buffet restaurant for the duration of the stay. Today, we're seeing numerous restaurants and even ice cream parlours, often available as part of an all-inclusive package, which is great for families with kids."

The following morning, we woke to the murmurings of a thunderstorm in the distance. Despite the spectacular sea view from my vast, comfortable bed, finding myself without the distractions of the journey and our new surroundings, my emotions caught up with me. It was tempting to simply curl up under the duvet and stay in bed – but Georgie and I had activities booked. Soon, the gentle sounds of a harp were washing over me as I relaxed with a massage at Finolhu's elegant spa.

Georgie, meanwhile, was enjoying a smoothie-making class in the Teen Hut – a sustainably built bamboo structure, complete with a Maldivian-style thatched roof. A million miles from your average kids' club, this was more like a cross between a designer treehouse and a grand cathedral with its wooden beams and elegant architecture.

On the ground floor, a giant macramé lampshade hung from the ceiling alongside a juice-making bar. Bean bags and slouchy sofas in coral red and turquoise looked perfect for chilling on, while a bamboo spiral staircase led up to a mezzanine with games consoles, a 3D printer, electric guitars, drum kits and DJ decks.

Over the next few days, Georgie learned to make one of her favourite foods at a teens' sushi-making class and hung out with fellow teenagers she had met on the beach. Meanwhile, I had the chance to explore some of the grown-up activities on offer, including painting seashells in the stylish Art Studio during a mindful Sip and Paint session.

Time apart meant the things we did together felt even more memorable – including hanging upside down in aerial yoga

TWO'S COMPANY

Trying out different activities meant we could compare notes while enjoying superb lunches and dinners at Finolhu's extensive choice of restaurants, where options range from a fine-dining Japanese restaurant on stilts over the Indian Ocean to Crab Shack, a serene five-minute *dhoni* boat ride away or 20-minute stroll along a white sandbank.

Time apart also meant that the things we did together felt even more memorable. We found ourselves hanging upside down from ropes in an aerial yoga class. I have practised hatha yoga for years but had never tried the aerial kind, which involves hooking your knees over strong straps suspended on hooks from the ceiling beams. Georgie has never been a particular fan of yoga but found herself absolutely loving it. "I really liked going upside down cross-legged and doing different stretches I hadn't tried before," she told me. "It made me feel relaxed and happy."

Then, on our penultimate day, Georgie and I headed out for a snorkelling excursion on the resort's private ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The yoga pavilion at Finolhu; snorkelling with turtles PICTURE: Shutterstock/JMontes



yacht under the expert guidance of marine biologist Ivanna Tobar.

Neither Georgie nor I had ever snorkelled before, and although I'm a reasonably competent swimmer, the idea of jumping into the middle of the ocean, miles away from dry land – even with a life jacket – seemed frankly terrifying. Georgie on the other hand (who was chosen for her local swimming squad) was thrilled at the prospect.

Yet with Ivanna's gentle encouragement, I soon felt like Jacques Cousteau as Georgie and I gazed in wonder at turtles and the technicolour display of yellow, blue and mauve fish swimming above the creamy coral.

On our final afternoon, Georgie and I went for a walk on our own. As our feet sank into the gently sloping dunes, Georgie called out: "Look, Mummy", pointing excitedly

to a tiny baby crab, its spidery legs sidling along at breakneck speed near her toes.

At that moment, I realised I had made the right decision in choosing to go ahead with our trip. Georgie and I had had our own tropical island adventure, experiencing much of the Maldives' magic in our own ways as well as together – and my mum would have been so happy to know that. **TW**

BOOK IT

Inspiring Travel offers seven nights' bed and breakfast at Finolhu, A Seaside Collection Resort, staying in a Private Pool Villa, from £13,445 for two adults and one teenager. The price includes return Emirates flights from Heathrow, domestic flights and speedboat transfers, based on a departure of February 14, 2026. inspiringtravel.co.uk

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