

# Inclusive isles



Can you combine Indian Ocean luxury with the ease of all-inclusive?

**Joanna Booth** puts two Maldivian resorts to the test

**T**he sun-kissed island resorts of the Maldives don't have much in common with Antarctica. Yet this idyllic honeymoon favourite does share one attribute with the White Continent – both are uniquely well-suited to an all-inclusive pricing plan. Neither offers opportunities to pop down the road to a local restaurant, save money by self-catering, or get good deals on activities and excursions through stiff competition.

## ONE ISLAND, ONE PRICE

All-inclusive hotels in the Maldives have been more common at the lower and mid-range ends of the market – and while budget-friendly properties have their place in the Med, clients who are forking out for long-haul flights to the Maldives tend to have higher expectations.

I'd tried an all-inclusive stay in the Maldives before and been disappointed. But the list of inclusions at the two Ozen resorts in South Malé Atoll was reassuring. Champagne on tap, à la carte dining at multiple restaurants, non-motorised watersports, kids' club, yoga classes, sommelier-led dinners, gin tastings, cinema under the stars, plus boat transfers – all

as part of the package. Inspiring Travel says these two properties are among its most popular in the Maldives, thanks to the simplicity and comprehensive nature of the product. All guests stay all-inclusive, so there's no need for wristbands, and the included spa treatments and chance to dine at Móm, Maadhoo's underwater restaurant, are key selling points.

## TRANQUIL MAADHOO

As the lift doors opened into Móm, I realised I was holding my breath – and not just because I was excited to be ticking off a signature Maldivian experience. With this restaurant – like all the others at the hotel – being part of the all-inclusive plan, I wondered if it would live up to expectations.

I needn't have worried; there isn't a bad seat in the house. Every one faces an underwater window and tables are so close to the glass that a passing blacktip reef shark seemed to eyeball my delicious four-course tasting menu – I had chosen the seafood option.

I soon realised that all the complimentary experiences at Ozen Life Maadhoo would be of a similar standard. Included spa treatments, often

Kayaking at Ozen Life Maadhoo

CTUR - The Ozen Collection



## DESTINATIONS

### INDIAN OCEAN | THE MALDIVES



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Móm underwater restaurant, Ozen Life Maadhoo; Ocean Pool Reserve Sunset with Slide villa, sunset and kids' club, all Ozen Reserve Bolifushi PICTURES: The Ozen Collection/Ibrahim Mithah



rather cursory, last a full hour – I opted for an excellent upper body massage with aromatherapy oils.

Maadhoo is a very peaceful island, even by Maldivian standards. All the public areas are concentrated in two central spots, so the 95 overwater and beach villas are pin-drop quiet. The decor is serene, with lots of white, pale wood and pops of colour, and both villa types are available with private pools, making this hotel a fantastic option for those seeking pure relaxation.

While keen underwater explorers might note the lack of a house reef, the daily snorkelling boat trips (at no extra cost) are a generous provision to compensate. I also loved the sunset fishing experience, reeling in a few snappers with a little help from our expert skipper.

#### VIBRANT BOLIFUSHI

Things were rather buzzy over at sister property Ozen Reserve Bolifushi where, with an embarrassingly audible scream considering the relatively modest size of the slide, I plunged down

into the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. This is an island with atmosphere, from the upbeat vibe of Ozar bar with its pool table and overwater hammocks, to the collection of villas with their own waterslides – which I enjoyed, despite my cowardly tendencies.

The paradise vibes at this hotel come with plenty of complimentary pastimes. I snorkelled every day on its two excellent house reefs and tried out stand-up paddleboarding. There's just as much to do out of the water: the roster includes yoga, meditation and sound baths at the beautifully verdant spa garden, and spa treatments here were just as impressive as at Maadhoo. The kids' club is a standout – a huge area with its own pool, mini-football nets and lots of shady space to play.

Dining was exceptional, from the tasty thali at Indian restaurant Saffron to an indulgent gastronomic evening with wine pairings at overwater Origine. Even the Vista del Mar buffet exceeded expectations, with dishes cooked to order alongside the extensive help-yourself options.

Families or energetic couples will be in their element here and

“My trip ended with a floating breakfast delivered to my private pool

when downtime is required, its 90 palatial villas await, each with a butler known as a *hiyani*, meaning ‘shadow’ in the Maldivian language. Both beach and overwater options have a gently Asian theme, with lots of dark wood and soaring, tilted thatched roofs. My *hiyani*, Jaaney, helped me end my trip with another iconic Maldivian activity – a floating breakfast delivered seamlessly to my private pool.

#### IMPRESSIVE RESORTS

I might have arrived a sceptic but I left both resorts genuinely impressed. The quality of accommodation, dining and breadth of inclusions is undeniable, so if you have clients who enjoy the likes of Ikos Resorts, you could feel confident selling to this market.

Maldives regulars with high-end expectations might pick holes here and there. Maadhoo has no house reef, though offers complimentary snorkelling boat trips instead. And Bolifushi falls short of other resorts in terms of isolation, with Malé and a neighbouring property on the horizon. But there's little not to love.

And as each property appeals to a different type of traveller, you can keep a whole host of clients – and their wallets – happy. **TW**

#### BOOK IT

**Inspiring Travel** offers seven nights in an Earth Pool Villa at Ozen Reserve Bolifushi from £6,025 per person, based on two sharing an Earth Pool Villa Sunrise on an all-inclusive basis. Includes return flights and catamaran transfers. [inspiringtravel.co.uk](https://inspiringtravel.co.uk)

**If Only** can book a seven-night stay in an Earth Villa at Ozen Life Maadhoo from £9,790, all-inclusive, based on two sharing. Includes return flights and boat transfers, based on a November 8 departure. [ifonly.net](https://ifonly.net)