

Maldives, but more

This Indian Ocean escape is innovating with a host of new resorts just in time for winter, finds **Tamara Hinson**



Sumptuous overwater villas and private infinity pools no longer cut it in the Maldives. Now, there's a growing emphasis on sustainability, and more resorts are forging their own paths, whether it's with treehouse-like stilted villas or kids' clubs specialising in science-based activities. Here, we take a closer look at three of the region's most innovative resorts.

SUSTAINABILITY WITH STYLE

Where: Amilla Fushi

Tell me more: The first inkling that things are done differently on Amilla Fushi, which I reach from Malé via a domestic flight and speedboat, comes when I clap eyes on my treetop villa, set back from the beach and surrounded by lush greenery. It provides the privacy offered by overwater villas, without the thundering surf that can keep clients awake.

Amilla Fushi is huge and with just 67 villas, there's plenty of space – brilliant news for younger guests. When they're not roaming the island on complimentary bikes, children between four and 12 can head to the Sultan's Village Kids' Club, while teens can try everything from DJ lessons to cocktail masterclasses.

Other amenities include a Padi dive school and activities such as parasailing,

wakeboarding, volleyball, badminton and football, alongside a schedule of snorkelling excursions (the resort is on the Boa Atoll, a Unesco-listed site famous for its manta rays) and sea fishing.

Equally innovative is the approach to sustainability, honed during the quieter months of the pandemic. Chiara Gambini, Amilla's new marine biologist, has created a Mini Marine Biologist scheme and will soon launch a coral regeneration project.

But it's the sustainable approach to food that blows me away. There's a banana plantation, hydroponic garden and mushroom hut, plus guests can help collect eggs from 'Cluckingham Palace', a chicken house in the style of a Maldivian dwelling. There are homemade probiotic sodas and kombucha teas, and as part of the Wellness your Way scheme, dedicated menus for followers of keto, gluten-free, vegan and dairy-free diets.

This extends to the Javvu Spa, where highlights include traditional *dhivehi* beys treatments using natural Maldivian ingredients, alongside chroma therapy, where swirling colours are projected on to a large screen accompanied by sounds and vibrations via a high-tech chair. Amilla is the only Maldivian resort to offer this service, which involves selecting colours to fit your mood. Apparently, ➤

DESTINATIONS

INDIAN OCEAN | MALDIVES

WHAT'S NEW

Many openings and refurbishments have been delayed, but high-profile additions include the Raa Atoll's health-focused, 68-villa **Joali Being**, which opened in November, and the 109-villa **Hilton Maldives Amingiri**, which will open next year.

In February, the **Conrad Maldives Rangali Island** will unveil the results of a three-year renovation, which includes the refurbishment of 50 overwater villas.

The **Avani+ Fares Maldives Resort** will open in Baa Atoll in mid-2022.

my choices suggest I'm content but slightly drained. Dashing from the dive school to the spa was hard work, after all...

Book it: Rates start at £670 per night for a two-person Treetop Villa, including taxes.
amilla.com

SOLO SALVATION

Where: Patina Maldives, Fari Islands

Tell me more: The team behind Patina Maldives, a short speedboat ride from Malé, has thrown out the rule book. The modernist property opened in May, and its neat lines – designed by Brazilian architect Marcio Kogan – wouldn't look out of place in Palm Springs. Everything is easy on the eye, whether it's the beautiful Rake boutique or the resort's spaceship-like yacht Adastrá. Unusually, the 11 room categories include a block of hotel-style rooms known as Fari Studios.

Despite its slick design, there's a cleverly engineered community vibe

thanks to the Fari Marina Village, a hub where highlights include free ice cream doled out from a tuk-tuk and events such as campfire marshmallow-toasting sessions. It's a reminder that although Patina will inevitably appeal more to adults, there's plenty for younger guests. For children aged between four and 11, there's the Footprints kids' club, while those six and over can check out the Fab Lab, with its 3D printer and science-based activities.

As with most resorts, butler service comes as standard and relies on WhatsApp, although it's a more formal service than most. As an artificial island, Patina isn't as lush as other resorts, but there's plenty of room to roam thanks to its three-island concept. Shuttle boats whisk guests across the water to the Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands, and will eventually connect to the Capella Maldives, Fari Islands, when it opens in 2023. Guests can use other islands' facilities – although in reality, there's little reason to venture farther afield.

Patina's 12 food outlets include a plant-based restaurant and the Fari Beach Club, where diners can feast on dishes prepared by Michelin-starred chef Nick Bril. But save some room – it's just a few metres from the ice cream tuk-tuk.

Book it: Rates start at £1,623 per night for a two-person Beach Pool Villa, including service and taxes.
patinahotels.com

FAMILY FUN

Where: Siyam World Maldives

Tell me more: As my seaplane swoops over Siyam World, it's impossible to miss its USP – an enormous floating obstacle course, formed of supersized letters spelling out Siyam. It's not the only larger-than-life element. The 54-hectare resort, which opened in October, is the biggest in the Maldives, with 472 villas and 21 room categories. Despite its development, the island has a wonderfully wild feel. I explore via a tangle of sandy paths which at various points feel more like tunnels, due to the dense greenery.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Ocean Reef House, Amilla Fushi; Veyo spa, Siyam World; Patina Maldives; Water Villa with slide, Siyam World Maldives

PICTURES: Georg Roske; Ishan@seefromthesky



At Siyam World, the fun factor has been cranked to the max, whether it's with colourful, overwater villas, each with its own slide, or the way the island's areas are named after cities. There's a huge range of diving courses, alongside more unusual activities such as scooter snorkelling and 'mermaid courses'.

Despite the endless array of family-friendly features – amenities include a Fifa-standard football pitch, tennis courts with three different surfaces and a fantastic club for children aged three to 11 – Siyam World is also a great option for couples and solos. Most of the 12 restaurants and bars are at the southern end of the island, but at the northern tip, I enjoy solo sundowners at Mint bar or lounging by the adult-only pool. Perhaps bigger really is better, after all.

Book it: Rates start at £431 per villa per night for a two-person water villa with pool on a Wow! Premium All-Inclusive basis, excluding taxes.

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