

Kings of Siyam

Two contrasting resorts on Noonu Atoll – Sun Siyam’s Siyam World and Iru Fushi – make **Robin Murray’s** Maldives trip a dual delight

Sun Siyam’s all-inclusive resorts in the Maldives are becoming increasingly popular with Brits and it’s not hard to see why, with much to keep visitors entertained in typically Maldivian beach settings.

In early 2023, UK guests accounted for 27% of visitors at Siyam World and 19% at Iru Fushi, both marked increases on 2019 and 2022 levels.

Each of the resort operator’s five properties in the Maldives has a distinct feel, as I discovered after visiting two of them. Siyam World, the brand’s latest resort, which opened in 2021, is for sun-worshippers

who can’t sit still, with a host of water and land-based sports to try, while Iru Fushi, which offers everything that wellness-seekers could want, has boomed in popularity this year, with occupancy figures up 35% compared with 2019.

WORK OUT

THE ACTIVE RESORT

Siyam World’s impressive range of activities both on land and in the water make it a sports lovers’ paradise, offering guests of all abilities something they’ll love to rediscover or try for the first time. ➤

DESTINATIONS

INDIAN OCEAN | MALDIVES

3
OF THE
BEST

EXCURSIONS

Snorkelling: Get up close and personal with the wonderful array of colourful marine creatures that reside in the atoll, including parrotfish, surgeonfish and clownfish. The boat journey to the snorkelling location takes about 20 minutes, and life jackets are provided for clients who aren't confident in the water.

Dolphin-spotting sunset cruise: Witness a spectacular sunset over the Indian Ocean and the chance to see dozens of dolphins putting on a show alongside the boat. Enjoy a glass of champagne to make the experience even more special.

Desert island dining: Visit an uninhabited island where lunch has been arranged and set up for you in time for your arrival, before cooling off with a dip in the Indian Ocean.

fast fact

Eighty per cent of Brits are planning to spend more on their holidays in 2023, while nearly a third said the Maldives was their top bucket-list destination, according to a survey of 2,000 holidaymakers by Sun Siyam Resorts in May.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Dolphin-spotting sunset excursion; Siyam Water World; Arigato restaurant, Siyam World; Seabob, Siyam World



SPORTS GALORE

On land, the recreation centre's range of sports includes tennis, badminton, basketball, beach volleyball and futsal. Padel is also played on a new court and there's even a full-sized football pitch, with kickabouts organised on a regular basis for staff and guests to play together.

As a keen tennis player, I decide to try my hand at padel for the first time. The Mexican racket sport is said to be the fastest-growing in the world, and it doesn't take me long to see why; especially when played in such an idyllic setting, surrounded by palm trees and with the sound of exotic birds chirping above.

WATER WORKOUT

Guests who prefer to keep cool on the water aren't short of options either. Stand-up paddleboarding, kayaking and windsurfing are among the gentler activities, while adrenaline junkies have the choice of hydroflying, jetskiing and a speedboat tour.

I choose to have a go on a Seabob – an electrically powered body board on which I glide through the water at up to 13mph and dive beneath the surface to swim alongside the fish. It's such fun that I return later for another go.

Siyam World is also home to the Indian Ocean's biggest floating water park, with free entry for guests. It provides hours of fun whatever your age, as I discover

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while attempting to clamber over the various obstacles in the quickest time possible, ending up in the water more than I'd like to admit.

NEW AND UNEXPECTED

If you'd told me horse riding was available in the Maldives, I'd have said you were pulling my leg, but Siyam World has made it possible with four rare-breed Indian horses housed in a ranch. Guests can book a sunrise or sunset beach ride, with photoshoot packages available.

CULINARY PARADISE

All those activities use up a lot of energy and Siyam World has plenty of places to refuel. The *crème de la crème* is arguably Takrai, a Thai restaurant just off the jetty, which offers a vast array of pan-Asian dishes plus stunning views of the Indian Ocean. Japanese fine dining in Arigato, fresh seafood in the Wahoo Grill and Indian fine dining at Kurry Leaf are just some of the other choices. Five bars, ➤



ABOVE: Aerial view of Sun Siyam Iru Fushi

including adult-only venues and a jungle pool bar, serve every drink imaginable, from lagers to eye-popping boozy cocktails.

CHILL OUT THE WELLNESS STAY

While Siyam World is perfect for active, thrill-seeking guests, the more diminutive Iru Fushi is an oasis of calm, and from the moment I arrive I immediately feel relaxed and at home.

WELCOME TO PARADISE

My butler – the lovely Aleef – greets me as I disembark the seaplane following the 40-minute journey from Velana International airport and makes me feel instantly welcome before driving me to my Deluxe Beach Villa. Here, the wow factor really kicks in. I spend a good 30 minutes taking in every feature, including the secluded private pool stretching out onto the beach and outdoor bathroom with a hot tub – already filled for me. Most notably, a private area of beach means I don't have to worry about fending off fellow guests for a sun lounger.

SPA BLISS

With more than 140 treatments covering Eastern and Western spa techniques, all provided in a stunning, tranquil setting, it's no wonder Iru Fushi's spa has scooped numerous awards. Hidden away among tropical vegetation, it's accessed via a reflexology path that applies varying amounts of pressure to your feet, and in the spa itself pebbled paths flanked by

“I sink my coconut sapling in a pre-dug hole – it gives me a special feeling to know I now ‘own’ a piece of Iru Fushi

waterways lead to 20 treatment rooms. I opt for a traditional Thai massage, which is out of this world. An Ayurvedic doctor is on hand to help guests decide which treatment is best for them, should they wish, and there's also a beauty salon and hydrotherapy facilities, including a sauna and steam room.

GIVING BACK

Sun Siyam's coconut tree planting scheme is a great way for guests to literally leave a positive mark on the island. Aided by the gardening team, I sink my sapling in a pre-dug hole, with chief gardener Wasantha telling me it will grow to a height of 15 feet and likely start bearing fruit within five years.

It gives me a special feeling to know that I now “own” a piece of Iru Fushi – with a commemorative personal plaque at its base to prove it. I find it a very therapeutic and rewarding experience and one that I'd recommend to all guests visiting the island. The number of plaques with names and hearts engraved on them dotted around the island would suggest this is a popular activity for couples looking to make their stay truly memorable. It also provides a very good reason to come back in five years' time. **TW**

BOOK IT

Gold Medal offers three nights in a Deluxe Beach Villa at Sun Siyam Iru Fushi and seven nights in a Water Villa with Pool and Slide at Siyam World, both on an all-inclusive basis, for £4,489 per person, based on two sharing. Price includes Etihad Airways flights from Heathrow, departing on September 24. goldmedal.co.uk