

Love island

Lina Molloholli checks in to the new adult-only Obalu Select Lobigili, where everything is designed for romance

As I gaze out across the water, it takes just a few moments to see them. From the depths of indigo comes a splash and a squeal – a small fin rises above the surface, followed by a playful whip of a tail, as the dolphin playfully explores, just metres from our boat.

I watch in awe as the dolphin gracefully dives in and out of the water, soaking up all our attention. This part of the island isn't where the crew usually finds dolphins, we're told, so I can't believe our luck.

Enjoying a round of refreshing smoothies made with local fruit, we take in the unspoilt views of the surrounding lagoons as the blue sky turns golden. For a moment, it feels like the whole world around me is changing colour with this Maldivian sunset.

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

I'm staying at Obalu Select Lobigili, one of eight Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts in the Maldives. The adult-only resort – which the brand has dubbed

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Aerial view of Oblu Select Lobigili; island hostesses; underwater restaurant Only Blu

PICTURES: Hammi; Ismail Niyaz; Sarah Lucy Brown

the 'island of love' – is built with romance in mind. It's a 20-minute speedboat journey from Malé in the North Malé Atoll, and on arrival we're serenaded by a saxophone performance over drinks by the infinity pool.

Oblu Select Lobigili prides itself on its smaller size and peaceful ambience, and guests can walk across the island in 15 minutes (tip: shoes are very much optional). The resort's 44 overwater villas come with glass floors and hammocks suspended above the sea, while the 24 beach villas are surrounded by palm trees and lush tropical gardens, opening out onto the Indian Ocean.

My beach villa is elegantly furnished, with a classy beige and amber colour palette. The enormous windows look out over my private plunge pool, which is surrounded

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by leafy green plants – the ideal setting for an intimate sunset dip.

There are locally made Forisca skincare products in the room, including a signature sunscreen and a blueberry lip balm – plus all the usual amenities, provided by The White Company.

TOP TABLES

There are three main dining options at Oblu Select Lobigili: food trucks under the palms at Gaadiya 17; the Maldives' largest under-ocean dining experience Only Blu; and Ylang Ylang, with open walls that overlook the ocean, meaning dinners come with a side

of stargazing after sundown. Ylang Ylang caters to every taste, with options spanning Mediterranean, Italian, Indian, Japanese and Maldivian. For a truly standout experience, ask talented chef Rahul for his ultra-fresh signature seafood pasta. And for drinks, there's the Swing Bar. At every venue, staff are attentive and happy to take care of every tiny detail with a smile, which was this castaway's favourite part of the experience.

OCEAN ADVENTURES

There's never a dull moment on the island, with all kinds of active adventures available for every ➤

ASK THE expert



Chris Crampton, chairman of Pata UK & Ireland

“The Maldives continues to be one of Pacific Asia's most popular holiday destinations, proven in a recent poll of our Pata agents. Almost a fifth (19.6%) of bookings made are to the Maldives and 51% are for winter 2022-23. Agents also reported that 42% of their clients are willing to spend more on travel and upgrade their holidays, which is why luxury beach holidays are thriving. While the Maldives remains an incredibly popular honeymoon destination, and it's boom is partly due to postponed wedding and honeymoon plans finally taking place, post-Covid travellers are also seizing the moment and spending pent-up holiday budget on blow-out trips. With several new resorts, from affordable to uber-lux, the islands have never been more accessible to couples seeking a romantic getaway.”

Oblu Select Lobigili jetty



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Private cinema

For added romance, staff can arrange a private film screening for two. Couples can choose from a list of Hollywood blockbusters and international classics to watch in an atmospheric setting: under the stars on the resort's sandy beach, surrounded by torch and candlelight.

Romantic rendezvous

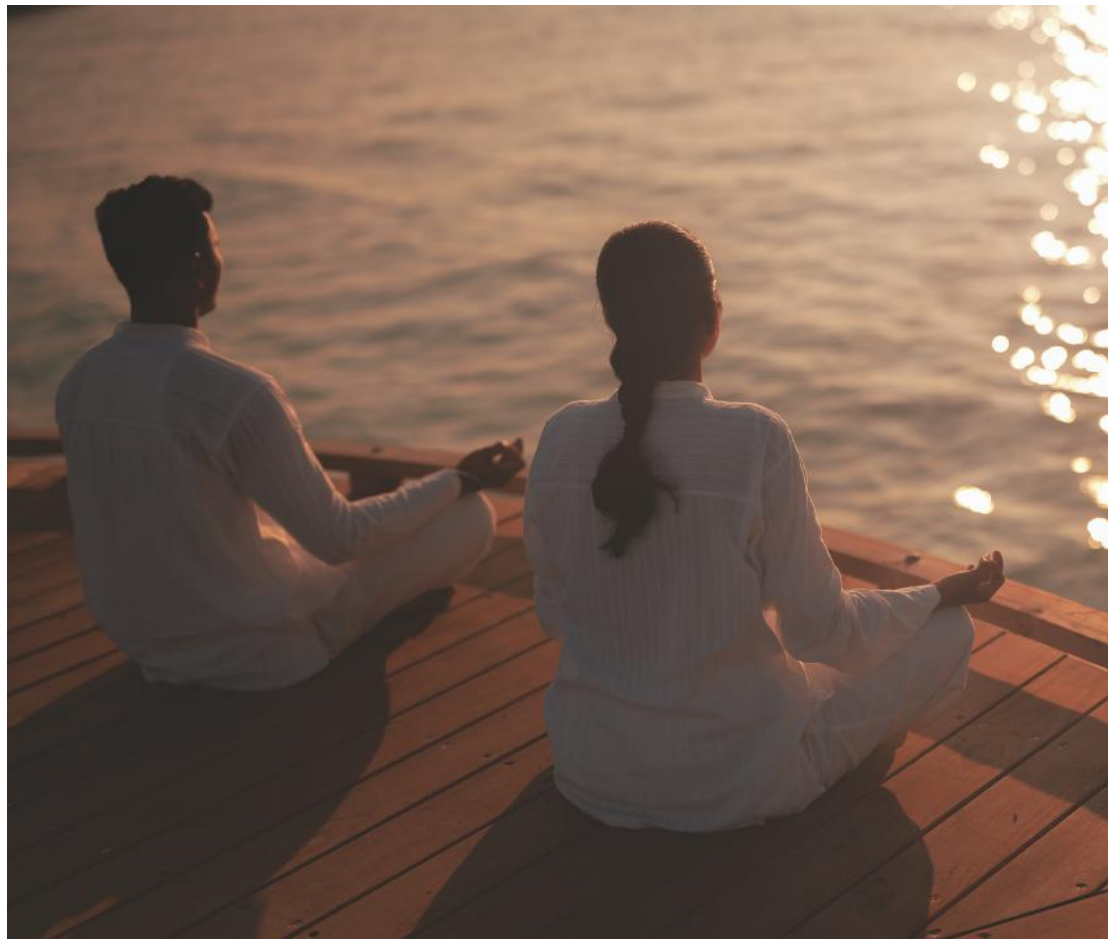
A few minutes off the shore from Lobigili is a tiny, heart-shaped island, surrounded by turquoise water, where couples can find the ultimate romantic setting. Perfect for a swoonworthy spot to pop the question, or a place for the ultimate castaway wedding ceremony.

Floating breakfast

Couples looking for romance will love starting the morning with a floating breakfast on a heart-shaped board (pictured). Guests can choose from a range of options, from fruit and pastries to cheese and antipasti platters, plus tailor-made smoothies. Staff will set it afloat on the private plunge pool for an Instagram post that's difficult to beat.



Floating breakfast



ABOVE: Morning yoga overlooking the sea PICTURES: Ismail Niyaz

skill level. There's an overwater gym, for a workout like no other, and beach yoga sessions. Guests can also take out the resort's stand-up paddleboards and canoes, or take it up a gear with a ride on a jet-ski or banana boat.

Guests can also dive or snorkel with the island's Padi and SSI-certified dive centre to explore some of those rich Maldivian reefs, filled with stingrays, parrotfish, reef sharks and razor-thin barracudas. On my 45-minute snorkel I see dozens of moray eels and vividly coloured fish dart around me. A group of turtles swim serenely past us, coming close without fear, while a pod of playful dolphins leap out of the water on the horizon.

TIME WELL SPENT

After an afternoon snorkelling and soaking up the sun, the resort's Elena spa is exactly what I'm in the

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mood for. It has an airy entrance hall and four double treatment rooms with a couples' bath, each enclosed in a lush tropical garden. A back and shoulder massage using coconut shells, and an expert facial by spa therapist Prisna has me in a state of total Zen as I head back outside for the rest of the evening.

As the last peachy sunbeams dip beneath the horizon, the light breeze and gentle crashing and roaring of the waves pull me back to reality. And what a lovely reality it is: a day spent lazing in a hammock, lounging on white-sand beaches and swimming with some of the most magical marine life. **TW**

BOOK IT

Kenwood Travel offers seven nights in a SunNest Beach Pool Villa for £3,657 per person, based on travel from November 4-11. The price includes flights from Heathrow with Etihad Airways, transfers, a 45-minute spa treatment, unlimited food and drinks, non-motorised watersports and a dining experience at Only Blu. kenwoodtravel.co.uk