

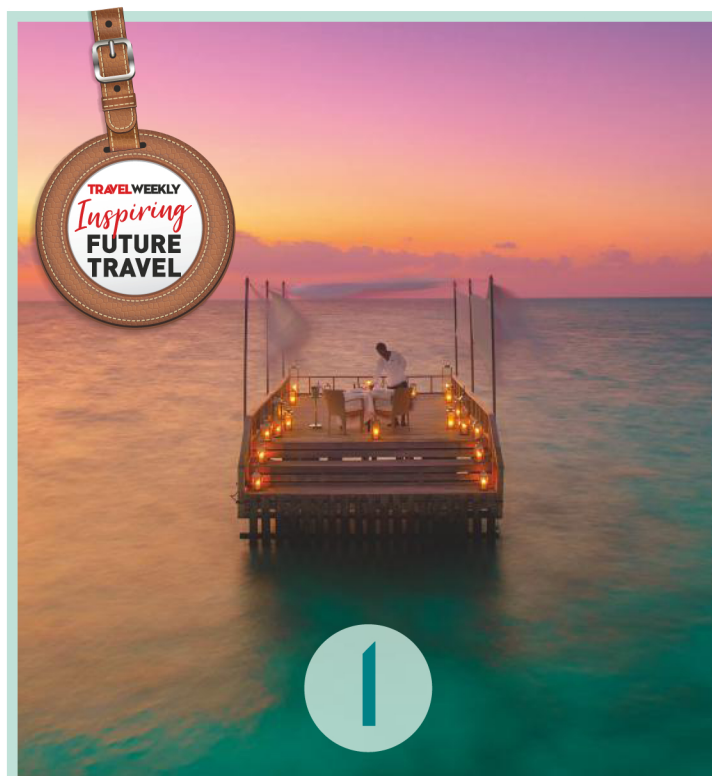
6 of the BEST

MALDIVES ESCAPES

Laura French picks out some of the best deals for clients in need of a break to look forward to

Travel might be off the cards for the moment, but hopes of a winter-sun getaway for early 2021 are still very much on the table for clients dreaming of sugar-sand shores, cerulean seas and opal blue skies (aren't we all?).

And with the Maldives ready to welcome Brits when travel does return, operators are offering some impressive savings. So where should you be looking to clinch some all-important sales? We've rounded up some of the best resorts, from family-friendly spots to all-out luxury retreats, with all the diving, catamaran sailing and dhoni boat dining you'd expect in this mesmerising archipelago.



BAROS MALDIVES, NORTH MALE ATOLL

For clients seeking a secluded, intimate resort, look to this lush island retreat, home to 75 villas scattered between tropical foliage and flanked by a protected lagoon. Experiences range from private dining on a dhoni (boat) to massages on the Piano Deck, diving excursions to sunset fishing trips, as well as a 'traditional techniques' workshop where guests can learn local skills such as how to crack a coconut. The new Baros Residence has also just opened, offering a palatial spot complete with 24-hour butler service, private tropical garden and huge infinity pool.

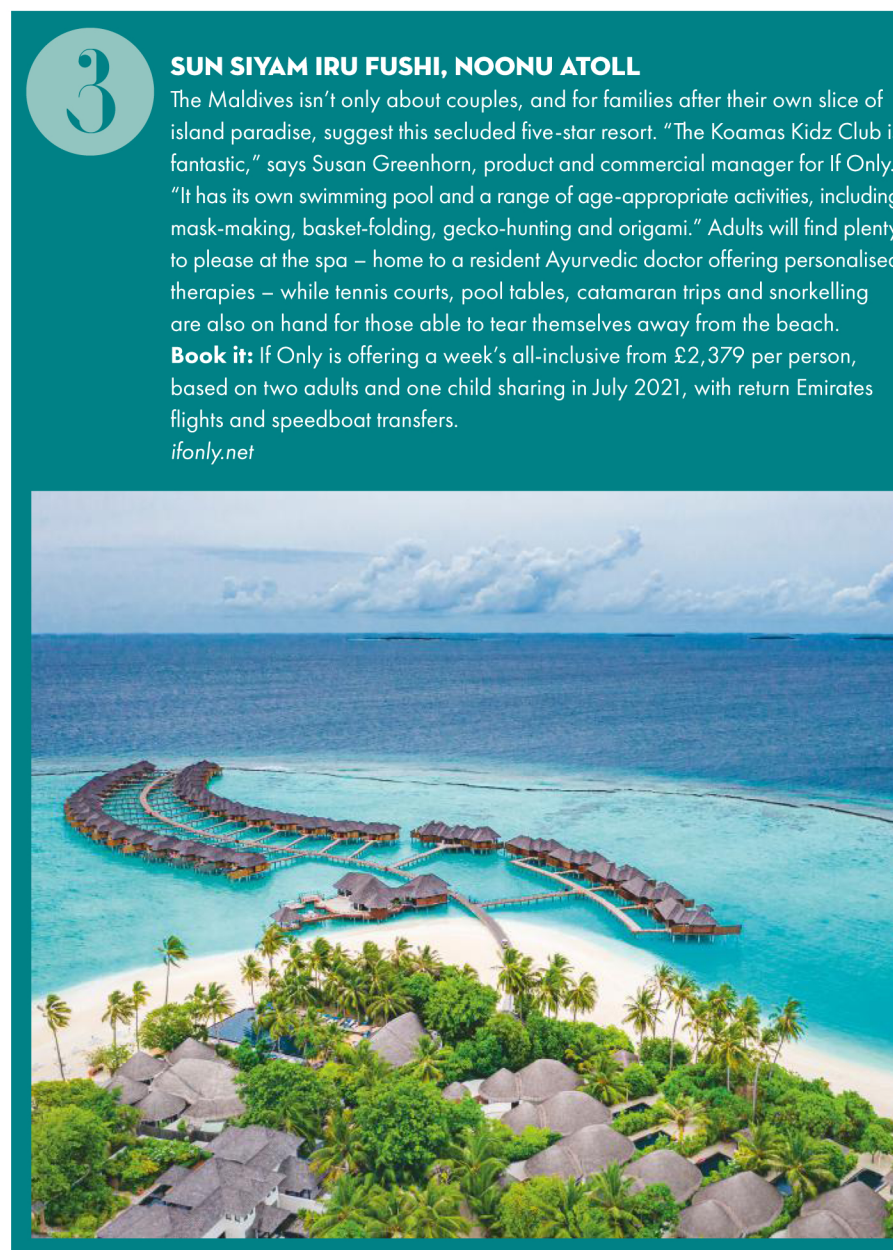
Book it: Abercrombie & Kent is offering seven nights' B&B from £1,450 per person, based on two adults sharing a Deluxe Villa between now and April 12, 2021 (excluding flights). abercrombiekent.co.uk



ADAARAN PRESTIGE VADOO, SOUTH MALE ATOLL

It's all about seclusion at this stylish, all-water-villa resort, where every guest gets a butler and their own private plunge pool jutting over the reef. Whale-watching from a submarine, photography flights, fishing excursions and parasailing trips are among the activities on offer, while the Mandara spa offers aromatherapy massages and Elemis treatments for those less keen on adventure. Guests can either book half-board or opt for an all-inclusive plan with set menus at the restaurants (one Maldivian, one Japanese). Accommodation spans three categories, including honeymoon villas for added romance.

Book it: Premier Holidays is offering seven nights' half-board from £3,199 per person for a December 20 departure, including flights from Heathrow, speedboat transfers and a Christmas Eve Gala dinner. premierholidays.co.uk



SUN SIYAM IRU FUSHI, NOONU ATOLL

The Maldives isn't only about couples, and for families after their own slice of island paradise, suggest this secluded five-star resort. "The Koamas Kidz Club is fantastic," says Susan Greenhorn, product and commercial manager for If Only. "It has its own swimming pool and a range of age-appropriate activities, including mask-making, basket-folding, gecko-hunting and origami." Adults will find plenty to please at the spa – home to a resident Ayurvedic doctor offering personalised therapies – while tennis courts, pool tables, catamaran trips and snorkelling are also on hand for those able to tear themselves away from the beach.

Book it: If Only is offering a week's all-inclusive from £2,379 per person, based on two adults and one child sharing in July 2021, with return Emirates flights and speedboat transfers. ifonly.net

VARU BY ATMOSPHERE, NORTH MALE ATOLL

Varu has earned its stripes when it comes to all-out luxury, with contemporary-design beach bungalows and overwater villas set against cerulean waters. You'll find everything from wine tasting to dolphin-spotting, sunset fishing to yoga classes on the agenda, alongside unusual offerings such as boduberu (local drum) sessions and palm leaf origami, with activities, excursions and non-motorised watersports all included in the price. Dining experiences include a weekly gala dinner with boduberu performances and a twice-weekly themed brunch with local music, so it's a good suggestion for clients after a livelier stay.

Book it: Pure Luxury is offering a week's all-inclusive in a Beach Villa from £2,829 per person, including speedboat transfers and British Airways flights from Heathrow, departing April 14, 2021. pureluxuryholidays.co.uk



DESTINATIONS

INDIAN OCEAN | MALDIVES

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KURAMATHI, RASDHOO ATOLL

For talcum-powder sands, family-friendly facilities and a comprehensive all-inclusive plan at an excellent price, Kuoni points to Kuramathi. The surrounding atoll boasts more than 20 dive sites – including the renowned Hammerhead Shark Point – so it's a good option for those into their watersports, while three buffet restaurants, two infinity pools, a spa complete with couples' water pavilion and a kids' club offering lessons on marine life add to the appeal. Accommodation spans beach bungalows, overwater villas and spacious honeymoon pool villas, with plenty to lure couples as well as those travelling with kids in tow.

Book it: Kuoni offers a week's full-board from £1,699 per person for selected departures in May and June 2021, with SriLankan Airlines flights from Heathrow.
kuoni.co.uk



Julie Winder,
head of product east, Gold Medal

"We saw an incredibly positive reaction to news of the travel corridor to the Maldives. Yes, clients are craving the sun and sand, but they're also attracted by the naturally Covid-friendly experience it offers with plenty of privacy, isolation and open air. Call volumes rose by several hundred per cent over the weekend following the travel corridor announcement, and room night sales jumped by 150% week on week. Our largest volumes are for winter-sun departures and bookings in May, for resorts such as Lux South Ari Atoll and Kuredu Resort & Spa. Across the destination, our team has been able to negotiate a range of value-added exclusives like meal or room upgrades, excursions or transfers – which seem to be of more interest to clients than pure discounts. What we're really waiting on now is for transit destinations like Dubai to open up, which will not only hugely increase flight capacity, but also bring numerous twin-centre options in to play."



top tip

Check the latest Foreign Office advice before travelling, plus you can find entry requirements for the Maldives at travelweekly.co.uk/restart-recovery/the-maldives

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COCO PALM DHUNI KOLHU, BAA ATOLL

Coco Collection knows how to do rustic luxury and its Dhuni Kolhu outpost is no exception, with exotic greenery ringed by turquoise waters and thatched roofs adding Maldivian flair. It sits on a Unesco Biosphere Reserve, so guests can expect exceptional diving and snorkelling with the likes of hawksbill turtles, grey reef sharks, bluestripe snappers and manta rays as companions. Other activities include wakeboarding, waterskiing, parasailing, jetskiing and big-game fishing, while two restaurants and two bars serve Asian cuisine, Maldivian-inspired dishes and fresh seafood against an idyllic ocean backdrop.

Book it: Sunset Faraway Holidays is offering seven nights' all-inclusive in a Beach Villa from £1,489 per person, including accommodation for two with British Airways flights and seaplane transfers, for travel between May 1 and September 30, 2021.
sunset.co.uk

PICTURES: Sakis Papadopoulos; Sebastian Posingis