



PARADISE IN DEMAND

MALDIVES All-inclusives

The pristine beaches and turquoise seas of this remote Indian Ocean archipelago have long been a magnet for honeymooners, divers, and those simply in need of some simple R & R. Now the country's new all-inclusive resorts are providing the perfect escape, says Lauren Jarvis

The Maldives Tourist Board had good cause to celebrate as last year came to a close: in 2013, the country had exceeded its visitor 'target' by attracting over one million tourists to its paradise islands.

Made up of 1,190 coral islands, 200 of which are inhabited, the Maldives' atolls stretch 90,000 sq kms across the equator, yet its land mass counts for just one per cent of its total area.

Unlike its Indian Ocean neighbours, the Seychelles and Mauritius, the Maldives' endless scatter of small-but-perfectly-formed islands has naturally led to the 'one-island-one-resort' concept, which lends itself perfectly to the all-inclusive holiday.

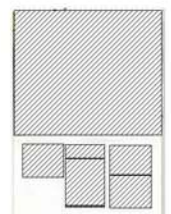
And with little development outside of the country's bustling capital, Malé, to provide a distraction, it's the ideal destination to focus on kicking back, enjoying some of the world's most beautiful beaches, or exploring the underwater wonders of the nation's incredible coral reefs.

Historically, all-inclusives were relatively basic

in the Maldives, but the last few years have seen a surge of high-quality resorts to suit most budgets. And while the most popular time to visit is the dry season from December to April there are special deals to be found all-year round.

Kuoni's Commercial & Product Manager, Sheena Paton, sees the Maldivian resorts' broad appeal as one of the country's key strengths.

"The Maldives continues to be our most popular destination because it has an island to suit everyone: honeymooners looking for romance and privacy, singles looking to escape



and rejuvenate and families wanting excellent children's facilities and activities. It's also very accessible from the UK, despite its location."

With economic optimism slowly returning to the UK, but customers still keeping a close eye on spending, all-inclusive resorts could offer the perfect holiday solution.

"The appeal of all-inclusive resorts is increasing, as not only are they good value for money, they also allow customers to know the total spend of their holiday in advance," says Richard Tams, Head of UK & Ireland Sales & Marketing for British Airways.

"The Maldives' all-inclusives work well because of the 'one-island-one-resort' concept. So, whilst there are a wide range of restaurants within the resort there are no outside outlets which may tempt them to spend."

One new resort looking to promote the appeal of booking a holiday with no extra costs, is [Atmosphere Kanifushi Maldives](#) ([atmosphere-kanifushi.com](#)), which opened in December last year.

The five-star resort is offering guests a Platinum Plus option, which not only includes à la carte dining and all beverages, but also extends to sports and excursions, down to smaller touches like Wi-Fi and sunscreen.

"Kanifushi's all-inclusive Platinum Plus plan offers incredible value for money. Customers can totally relax without having to worry about any hidden extras," explains Louise Ashworth, Indian Ocean Product Manager at Destinology ([destinology.co.uk](#)), which is offering a seven-night Platinum Plus package at Kanifushi throughout May and June for £2,389 pp, including flights and seaplane transfers.

With new high-quality resorts, a wide choice of airlines, and some unique all-inclusive packages emerging, it seems there's never been a better time to experience everything the Maldives has to offer.

What's new

Hotels: Exclusive to Kuoni, the new five-star Kandolhu Island Resort ([kandolhu.com](#)) was due to open in February. A seven-night all-inclusive stay in May costs from £1,799pp in a Jacuzzi beach villa.

Maalifushi By Como ([comohotels.com](#)), opening on April 1 2014, will be the first luxury resort in the southwest's Thaa Atoll. The resort is offering seven nights for the price of five from May 1 to December 25 2014.

Velaa Private Island ([velaaprivateisland.com](#)) is an exclusive private island resort with beach and water villas. Opened in late 2013, rates start at £915 per villa.

Shangri-La's Villingili Resort & Spa, Maldives ([shangri-la.com/male/villingiliresort](#)) has unveiled the new M-Lounge. The bar offers a smooth transition from day to night, providing daytime refreshments served to your sun lounger, sun downers to your beanbags and the islands' only upscale live DJ spot

by night, with resident DJ Kate from the trendiest lounges of Singapore and Bali spinning tunes six nights a week, plus renowned DJ guests.

Operators: After a destination review, Thomson and First Choice ([thomson.co.uk](#) / [firstchoice.co.uk](#)) have confirmed that from May 2014, they will no longer offer holidays to the Maldives due to lack of customer demand. Thomson and First Choice say they will instead be operating to Mauritius.

Airlines: Passengers flying to the Maldives via Dubai from London Gatwick will be able to enjoy the luxury features of the double-decker Emirates A380 from March 30 2014 ([emirates.com](#)).

Tourism talk

"The Maldives had an exciting 2013 with regards to tourism. In February, we broke a record by having over 100,000 visitors to the islands. By the end of the year, we had welcomed 1.2 million to the country, and we're expecting this positive trend to continue throughout 2014.

"We'll be promoting the islands at travel fairs worldwide this year, including WTM in London.

"Last year saw the opening of several beautiful new resorts and there are some fantastic packages on offer, especially for weddings and honeymoons.

"Our all-inclusive resorts consistently deliver a high level of customer satisfaction. Our 2013 Visitor Survey

Above: the [Atmosphere Kanifushi Maldives](#) with, below, the [Jumeirah Dhevanafushi Talise Spa](#)

IT WAS THE VINO

BY LAUREN JARVIS

"My first visit to the Maldives was the result of a very long lunch one gloomy January, where a persuasive friend – and even more persuasive bottle of wine – whispered in my ear and told me to book myself a treat.

One spontaneous, and slightly slurry, call to a bemused Kuoni agent, and the deal was done. A week in Paradise for me and my mum – sorted.

A month later we were there, wandering barefoot on Kuramathi, giddy and dreamy and disbelieving that we'd finally made it to these distant isles, which had for so long symbolised everything that was exotic, remote and unspoilt. We were ready to be castaways.

We swam, ate, hammocked, snorkelled, yoga'd, pampered, talked and laughed our way through a week of bliss, cocooned in a technicaloured bubble, where every day took us further away from the real world. The perfect escape. The perfect treat."

The EXPERT'S OPINION

DIANE COURT
Head of Trade Sales,
Destinology



Why the big increase in all-inclusive in the Maldives?

As GST continues to increase, inflating the cost of importing food and beverages into the Maldives, clients are becoming more conscious of the expense whilst they are in resort. Due to the remoteness there is no opportunity for guests to visit local restaurants. This means that they are reliant on the resorts for dining options which can be a concern given the rising costs of F&B whilst in resort.

Briefly explain the different grades of all-inclusive

Basic levels include one main buffet-style restaurant that offers drinks only during meal times while Platinum or Gold-type packages include all dining outlets, drinks throughout the day and some even include an excursion or spa treatment during a seven-night stay.

What are the main selling tips for the islands?

At Atmosphere Kanifushi, all the villas have been built on the sunset side of the island giving all guests the benefit of the sunset view. The resort also boasts some of the largest sunset family villas and the first full sized 50m swimming pool in the Maldives. The Platinum plan all-inclusive even includes in-villa mini bar and complimentary wifi in all villas and suites.

Sample Package

Seven nights (for the price of five) in the

Atmosphere Kanifushi – Sunset Beach Villa on a Platinum all-inclusive basis with seaplane transfer included between May 1-June 20 is from £2860 pp. Emirates flights are via Dubai from GLA/MAN/NCL/BHX/LGW/LHR. 01204 474184
destinologyagents.co.uk



“The Maldives is the ultimate luxury escape, popular with couples, honeymooners and families. All-inclusive resorts are a good value-for-money option, which cater to guests’ needs, and offer a fantastic selection of dining options, all under one roof”

RICHARD TAMS, HEAD OF UK & IRELAND
SALES & MARKETING, BRITISH AIRWAYS