

SHERIDAN ROAD

NORTH SHORE STYLE
& SUBSTANCE
SEPTEMBER 2021

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standards high.”
-COCO CHANEL

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AQUATIC PARADISE

Anantara Kihavah Maldives resort

SHERIDAN ROAD 69

FIRST CLASS

KIHAVAH



Visit one of the Maldives' greenest resorts – an emerald in a necklace of islands shimmering in the Indian Ocean.

WORDS BY DUSTIN O'REGAN

Located between the Arabian and Laccadive seas, roughly 500 miles southwest of Sri Lanka, lies the Maldives, a country comprised of more than 1,000 islands. Our destination at **Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas** was a quick 35-minute seaplane trip from the capital city of Malé. Flying over the Indian Ocean, we were delighted by the broad spectrum of blue hues appearing in more variations than a color wheel. The liquid landscape was dotted with circular islands cresting the water's surface. The brightest blues radiated from the

island lagoons seemingly lit from beneath. The deep blues became even more striking upon our descent when juxtaposed against the white sand beach and lush island greenery. Just before landing, we noticed the ring of thatched roof overwater villas ... one of which would be our home for the week.

At the arrival dock, our Villa Host Ismail welcomed and whisked us off in a little green buggy. I can still hear the pitter-patter sound it made on the wooden planks en route to number 211, our deluxe overwater villa poised above the translucent ocean.

Entering 211, light poured through floor-to-ceiling windows

FIRST CLASS



OPPOSITE PAGE: Aerial view of over water villas
ABOVE: View from the bedroom of the over water pool villa **RIGHT:** Manta Rays in Hanifaru Bay
BOTTOM: FIRE interior



and doors – revealing contemporary interiors with stunning views of our decks and aquatic playground. The bedroom’s south doors opened onto an ample deck with three overwater hammocks, a suspended bed, and a dining table and chairs. The east doors led to an infinity-edge pool and a lower deck with plush lounge chairs and a staircase leading into the ocean.

Another favorite area of our new home was the bathing quarters consisting of an immense outdoor shower open to the ocean on two sides, a large glass-bottomed tub, a chaise, two floating sinks, and an indoor shower. The room’s glass floor panels and translucent wall overlooking the pool, deck, and sea created a seamless connection to our surroundings.

Often hours drifted by as we enjoyed the hammocks and pool. The weather was perfect, warm but not unbearably hot, and the constant ocean breeze and sweeping views made the experience absolutely intoxicating.

When venturing out of our cozy enclave, we found three bicycles next to the front door each bearing a small wooden license plate inscribed with our names. Cycling beneath canopies of palm fronds and over curving white sand pathways onto our next great adventure was utterly idyllic.

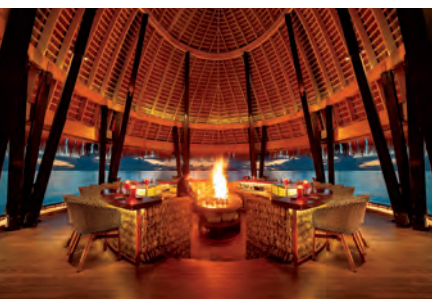
Every day unveiled new breathtaking thrills; one favorite was the “Manta Ray

Snorkeling Experience” in Baa Atoll’s Hanifaru Bay. The Bay is home to the world’s largest manta ray feeding region

where these enormous creatures congregate to gorge on the plankton-rich waters. The adventure began with an exhilarating 40-minute ride on a dhoni, the traditional Maldivian boat. It continued as we leapt into the water to get up close and personal with the majestic rays that can reach a wingspan of more than 16 feet. As I swam along, I turned to see a ray with its large mouth open, gliding swiftly toward me. Heart racing, I made a mad dash to get out of his way – I knew his mouth was open to capture plankton (not me) but it was pure instinct not to block his path. Although extremely large, these graceful creatures appeared to be participants in a ballet of sorts to an orchestra audible only to them. The experience was magical, heart-pounding, and soulful all at once.

Closer to home, great water adventures were literally at our doorstep. With our fins and masks in place, we’d hop off our balcony and head straight for the house reef encircling the island. One morning, with our snorkeling gear strapped to our backs and feeling quite like “locals,” we biked to the dive shop to explore another snorkeling route along the reef to the overwater spa.

To our utter delight, we came across an octopus. Such sightings are incredibly rare because octopi are highly intelligent and have the chameleon-like ability to alter their appearance and “disappear.” After our enchanting discovery, we descended further into the coral gardens of the house reef. An incredible number of colorful creatures inhabit the reef, but we took particular interest in the



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Over water villa pool

blacktip reef sharks, Triggerfish, Barracuda, and, of course, the ever-adaptable octopus. Just beyond the reef, the bottom of the ocean disappears into darkness creating a hauntingly beautiful scene.

One afternoon, we were excited to find that the dive shop offered clear kayaks—something my daughter has often talked about. We spent hours atop the Indian Ocean in our see-through vessels. The experience was surreal as we felt suspended over the glittering water in some sort of gravity-defying act.

The excitement of our days often left us famished. At these moments, our Villa Host Ismail picked us up for the quick ride to an overwater compound containing four dining options—Spice, Sea, Sky, and Fire.

Spice introduced us to haute Asian cuisine, Maldivian style. We often chose an herb-laced salad, naan bread, and rich spicy curries, which were shared around the table. My husband and daughter (the culinary duo in our trio) guessed at the ingredients attempting to discern the enchanting combinations. Yet, our efforts to recreate these delicacies at home have not been successful. Perhaps it was the open air, overwater setting and impeccable service that elevated our taste buds.

One morning for breakfast we descended below the ocean, walking down flights of stairs, through a beautiful underwater wine cellar, and into a

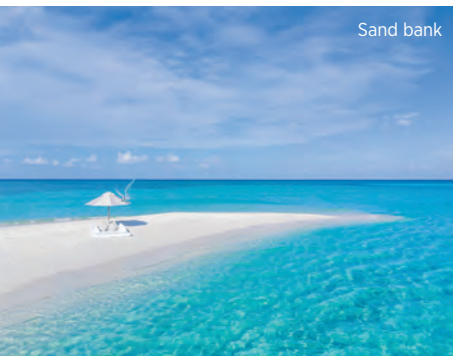


SEA, underwater restaurant

glass octagonal wonderland aptly named Sea. In the Maldives' first underwater wine cellar and restaurant, we feasted on a lavish presentation of meats, cheeses, delicate pastries, fruits, and lobster Benedict all while exotic sea creatures traveled to and fro.

We marveled at two Clownfish. The father floated outside the anemone home guarding his son just as depicted in the Disney film *Finding Nemo* – I could almost hear the father warning his child of the dangers that lie beyond the reef. We noticed a Moorish Idol like *Finding Nemo's* cantankerous Gill and a Regal Blue Tang like the film's forgetful Dory. After observing these fish, we are sure the film's screenwriters were well versed in the personalities of the character species as the Moorish Idol seemed a bit bossy and the Regal Blue Tang was not the cleverest of the underwater dwellers.

Throughout the meal, we delighted in this conversation of aquatic personalities and pointed to an endless array of colorful fish, identifiable by a book our waiter shared with us. An entire



Sand bank

FIRST CLASS

Jetty Board Walk



Underwater playground



SKY at sunset



world exists beneath the water's surface and the experience of being “part” of this world is one we will never forget.

On our way out, the waiter described the ocean's magical way of aging Champagne. I didn't know a bottle of bubbly could possibly be sexier—but aged beneath the ocean floor? C'est Magnifique.

For dining thrills Teppanyaki style, we visited Fire where the chef encouraged flames to pirouette across the grill and all manner of ingredients flew from her spatula. After the show, we devoured flame-kissed Japanese specialties, sashimi, and on one occasion, handpicked lobsters from the sea. All enjoyed under Fire's dramatically pitched roof with the intermittent caress of the ocean's breeze.

Seeking a celestial experience, we visited SKY for a starlit odyssey. Ascending to the highest of the compound's restaurants, we entered the Maldives' only overwater observatory. As we enjoyed a three-course chef's choice meal, our SKY Guru shared fascinating insights and used a “lightsaber” to point to constellations and planets in the night sky. After dinner, we stargazed through the Maldives' most powerful telescope and were even allowed to photograph the moon – a treasured keepsake.

That evening, inspired by our SKY Guru, we decided to sleep under the stars on our deck's floating bed. We were coaxed into a deep slumber by the lagoon's gentle sounds and a distant whisper of the ocean's roar.

Many mornings, we dined beachside at Plates selecting Maldivian spiced courses, smoked fish, and detox juices. A particular favorite was the Kihavah Benedict accented with just the right amount of spice. We savored each dish watching as waves carried the sun's reflection to the edge of the white sandy beach.

On our final day, we left villa 211 and rode our bicycles pitter-pattering down the wooden planks one last time thinking how lucky we were to have visited this floating paradise. Peddling along under a canopy of tropical fronds, we burst from the greenery's warm embrace to greet our departing seaplane. We ascended into the sky with our hosts waving goodbye until they disappeared from sight—just the white sand, the ring of overwater villas, and

the vast array of the ocean's blues were still visible.

Since our return home, I have noticed that every time I mention the Maldives the response is always the same ... “That is on my bucket list.” And so it should be. On our vacation, we checked off many things on our bucket list—visit the Maldives, swim with sharks and manta rays, enjoy an outdoor shower, stay in an overwater villa, and dine under the sea. Isn't it time you checked these off *your* list? The earth's greatest aquatic paradise awaits. Stay tuned in our October issue for Maldives part II and our visit to Niyama.

GREEN RESORT

One of the first things my husband, a conservation advocate, noticed at our villa were the glass bottles and the absence of plastic. When he mentioned this to our Villa Host, Ismail informed us that Kihavah is the proud recipient of a gold Green Globe Certificate and is one of the greenest resorts in the country. He explained that not one tree was removed during the resort's construction. On our many bicycle rides around the island, we noticed how the beach villas appear to have grown up around the trees. The resort is constantly reinforcing its commitment toward environmental conservation by reducing electricity waste, following a food waste management program, operating a water treatment plant on the island, and employing a zero-plastic policy. Even branches and shrubbery are shredded and reused as mulch. Sun, surf, sand, and *sustainability*—now that is truly beautiful.

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