

The Destination

Happy daze

Clear your mind on the remote Maldivian island where dopamine highs are always on the horizon

Edited by Bill Prince



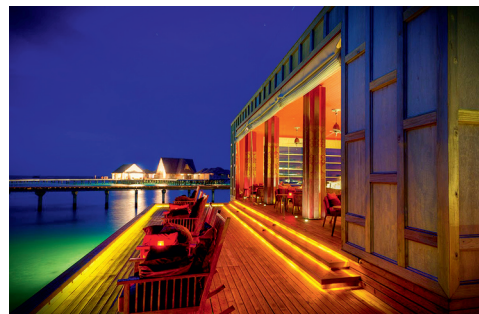
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It is true that in order to do yoga, all you need is an Oyster card and the ability to book a class. It's also true that in order to do mindful meditation, all you need is an app on your phone and the ability to shut a door. And it's even true that for a massage, all you need is a telephone and somewhere for the masseuse to put the folding table.

But let me also add this: while the first will no doubt take place in some sweat-pit gym, the smell of testosterone and self-loathing wafting through the air, the second in your bedroom and the third in your freezing garage after you realise there's not enough space in the lounge, if you have the chance to do all of the above on a tropical island paradise in the middle of the Indian Ocean... well, let's just say it's preferable.

That, in essence, is the appeal of Anantara Kihavah, an island resort in the Maldives' Baa Atoll, on the doorstep of



From top: Float above the high life at Anantara Kihavah; the neon-lit Sky bar

Hanifaru Bay, where feeling serene comes as standard and mindfulness activities make you – whisper it – a bit high.

No, really. It starts when you arrive on the island via a small seaplane, which gracefully belly-dives into the turquoise waters after a half-hour journey from mainland Malé and delivers

you directly to the jetty. As soon as your feet hit terra firma and you realise that all you can hear are the waves, with your palatial pad sitting above the water, and the horizon everywhere you look, you'll go through the following mental stages of island life: joy, confusion-at-the-joy, excitement, joy-at-the-excitement, calm and finally into a state of what can only be described as a sort of blissful, docile dumbness. The whole process takes about three minutes. I wouldn't recommend it for an existence, but for a holiday it's hard to beat. >>

Upon arrival you enter into a sort of blissful, docile dumbness



A Family Beach Pool Villa;
(below, from top) shoreline yoga;
and subaqua restaurant Sea



>> All of the expected water-based activities – there’s scuba diving to take advantage of teeming reefs within the Unesco World Biosphere Reserve, a boat trip to see dolphins, a highly recommended jaunt to swim with local manta rays and general paddling around – are just as joyous as you would expect, but it’s the wellness activities that send you right over the top. You’re already calm and serene; these provide a dopamine-high topper.

Everything is enhanced. Yoga, for instance, is “Aerial Yoga”, which takes place in the sea: you contort yourself into various Karate Kid poses while in/on/falling off a sling, as the waves crash around your waist. (The water proves particularly beneficial when you inevitably lose your balance and, rather than cracking your head open, you simply receive a refreshing dip.)

The meditation sessions take place on the beach, where the peaceful lapping of calm sea on soft sand hurts not one bit. The spa – also, naturally, built over water – offers a variety of healing therapies, from options that combine massage with ringing bell vibrations to others that make use of a selection of specialist hot oils.

There is even an island “slumber guru”, which, admittedly, is a little bit like having an “adrenaline guru” in a warzone, but

**You’re already serene.
The activities just provide
a dopamine-high topper**

who nonetheless will make you sleep even more soundly via a selection of pillows and aromatic essences.

There are the incredible five-star restaurants that you’d expect at such a high-end getaway – Fire, which grills things; Salt, which serves Asian cuisine; Plates, which serves most things; and Sea, which is underwater and offers diners the unique experience of trying to spot what fish it is they’re currently chewing – but even here there are plenty of holistic options. Most impressive of all is Chef Eric, a specialist in all variety of “wellness” cuisines, who will prepare you a fruit-grain-unknown-matter breakfast bowl that a) looks like the result of a grizzly accident at a muesli factory, but thankfully b) tastes out of this world.

You end your time numbly, dumbly wondering how anyone could live any other way; sadly, you’ll soon find out. **Stuart McGurk GQ**



**On the
grapevine**
Wine news
and whispers



Bubbles with buzz

Return guests to Michael Caines’ GQ Food & Drink Awards 2018-shortlisted Lympstone Manor will find a new attraction: approximately 18,000 vines, from which the chef will make his own sparkling wines. Working with James Matyear, formerly of award-winning sparkling wine producer Hattingley Valley in Hampshire, Caines’ first batch of Lympstone Manor Cuvée is expected in October 2023. **Rooms from £315 per night.** lympstonemanor.co.uk



Room with a view

Driving California’s Pacific-hugging Route 101 is such a rite of passage it’s surprising more hipster highway-side hotels haven’t sprung up. Enter – or rather re-enter – the Skyview Los Alamos, a reconditioned Fifties motel on the fringes of Santa Barbara wine country, now boasting 33 rooms and authentic Central Valley cuisine. Los Alamos is a micro-destination in itself, so leave time to explore its historic saloon and numerous galleries. **Rooms from £135 per night.** skyviewlosalamos.com