



The Ooze



**Peter Punj
discovers a deeper
shade of blue in
the Maldives**

I grew up on the beaches of Kuwait, water-skiing, knee-boarding, spearfishing, and trying out every other possible water-sport. I have always loved the ocean, and have visited some of the most beautiful beach destinations in the world. Yet nothing comes close to the Maldives. This tropical nation in the Indian Ocean was on my wish-list for the longest time, but for some reason or the other, my longing never got converted into a vacation. It wasn't until my 10th wedding anniversary that an opportune moment arose to finally make the trip. And since then we have travelled back to the Maldives

an BLUE





every year.

About 26 ring-shaped atolls, formed from over 1,000 coral islands, make up the Maldives. Known for its sparkling beaches, blue lagoons and stunning reefs, it is a place you have to see to believe. We landed in Male, the capital city, and what followed each day was a revelation. Travelling by sea-plane to the Four Seasons Landaa Giraavaru

Hotel, our home for a few days was spectacular. I was awe-struck by the inviting, crystal-clear emerald water, transparent all the way down to the ocean floor. I could just stare into the water for hours and be in bliss – it was that picturesque. Heightening the experience was the gorgeous hotel, which was the foundation of

one of the most beautiful, healthy vacations I have ever experienced. We immersed ourselves in the pristine tropical beauty of this remote island hideaway – a true escape to another world.

The spacious luxury villas are



beautifully spread out across a remote wilderness on Baa Atoll. Ours was located above the water, which is really the best way to feel the true essence of the Maldives. Each villa has three double beds – two outdoors and one in the master bedroom. Although you could possibly fit two children in as well, the villas are really designed for a couple. The resort itself is self-sufficient, offering various activities. However, those who simply do not want to step out can find something to do within the confines of the property – such as participating in a marine conservation programme, or opting for a luxurious night spa.

On another trip, we found our new favorite hotel, Amilla Fushi



Resort, a stunning property complete with private villas, pools and beach to name a few. The excellent service made all the difference and that's probably what's prompting us to return there every year.

It is hard to describe the Maldives in words, because its beauty is almost inexpressible. Keeping that in mind, I would say that if you want a truly relaxing and rejuvenating vacation, staying in luxury hotels of the highest standard, no place in the world rivals the Maldives.

The thrill of underwater

One of the most thrilling things to do is to explore the ocean by going diving or snorkelling. Considering that some of the world's best dive

sites are found in the Maldives, nearly all resorts have professional, fully equipped dive schools. One popular spot to get up close and personal with grey and white-tip reef sharks, giant snappers and tropical reef-fish is Mushimasingili Thila. It's in a pristine section of Ari Atoll – a protected dive-site that is ideal for a full-day trip. A very curious Napoleon Wrasse lives here, but the real kings of the reef are the sharks. It is thrilling when schooling fish and batfish surround you – and sometimes, you also see bigger fish, such as trevallies and tuna, hunting the fusiliers.

Take-home memories

Shopping and dining out can

be a fascinating window to the Maldivian life. Most resorts offer day-trips to other islands – a great way to explore local arts and craft. Get the best deals from local artisans in their workshops – from corals and seashells to masks and other artefacts that reflect the country's history. Male's busy sea-front is teeming with eateries that offer great international fare, as well as exotic Maldivian delicacies like Garudhiya – a fish broth served with rice, lime, chilli and onions. For those who love to dig deep into local flavours, there are several markets selling fresh and wholesome produce. ■



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