

travel

Baros

If this hotel were a rock star, it would be Jake Shears from the Scissor Sisters

The image Flashy and boutique-chic Baros has just had a big revamp and is now trying to cut a groove as an urbane island nook in touch with its inner metrosexual.

The groupies Hardly a big hotel (diving off the house reef and an eight-minute circuit is enough to take in the island's sights), this is one place you will find a little scene going on round the bar at 11pm – a little bit leopardskin, a little bit man-bag. You will also find people in heels here, which is very unusual in the Maldives.

The highs Last year, minuscule Baros had a radical facelift to elevate it into the big-boy zone (it is still a more financially reasonable option). It aimed to keep the Maldivian charm – no kids, no pool, no need to do anything – while injecting an element of contemporary cool. You'll either think 'how brilliantly daring!' or 'hookey-malookey'. Villas are a slick mix of homeyed woods, stone floors and designer lighting, with look-at-me beds beneath soaring columns and glass headboards. Bathrooms have glittering black and sculptural showers, some in adorable gardens. There's an incredibly good spa – the Maldivian Monsoon massage is a must. Eating is an event. The Lighthouse restaurant, with its weird meringue topping, is a breathtaking conceit in overwater dining. Only an ankle-tripping rail separates diners from the baby-shark-infested waters below.

The lows Beach villas are preternaturally dark – the price of privacy. The cooking can be, tiresomely flashy and breakfast feels like a fashion show. If you like your drinking swanky, it's all fine (neon-blue lounge bar among the palms or fancy champagne bar above the water) but the chilled island vibe is lost. And will someone kill the band?

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KATE MOSS

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If this hotel were a rock star, it would be Pharrell

The image The newest and most exciting hotel in the Maldives is a little bit Ibiza, a little bit Barbarella, a little bit Playboy mansion. That makes it sound filthy, but actually it's not. Actually, it's fabulously cool.

The groupies Party people. We first non-urban resort has a very urban groove. There's no point bringing your offspring or being coy: this is a sexpot.

The highs It's seriously hip with an underground vodka bar that has little nooks you can reach by stepping up on chunks of tree; upstairs daybeds in your beach villas that are really huge flat-bottomed Maldivian hammocks; souped-up golf carts; endless sexy, round day-beds; these fabulous places called Sweet Stops on the sandy footpaths where you can help yourself to Magnum ice-creams and half-bottles of Moët; sushi that an early Japanese crowd loved so much they ripped off their shorts; a beach restaurant built around a fire-pit; slick, funky overwater villas with their own BBQs.

The lows Early days, so it's difficult to tell. But let's hope that all these fabulous thrills and gimmicks are backed up with seriously professional staff who know what they're doing. In the meantime, the beach villas are too close together.

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TATLER 219

Maldives unplugged!

So this is **the Maldives**, the biggest beach story of the decade: 1,200 desert islands spread like sequins across the vast turquoise skirt of the Indian Ocean. It's freakishly perfect. Disco-blue waters, some of **the most heartbreaking diving** in the world and beaches so blonde you want to slap them. With no island more than two metres above sea level, we don't even know if they'll still be here in 50 years. (There's a rumour that, when the islands sink, Australia will grant asylum to all 360,000 inhabitants.)

Until then, no one's building a house here, so hotels are your only ticket in. And what hotels! They're like **fantasy made flesh**, like the secret face cream we'd sell our houses on Addison Road for. These are **hotels as rock stars**. So this is *Tatler's* guide to the most fabulous **dirty dozen**, including two new openings. In fact, there are 13 in total, but you know what they say – it's lucky, lucky, lucky for some.

By Melinda Stevens and Helen Pickles

Cocoa Island

If this hotel were a rock star, it would be Sting

The image Laidback glamour, floaty white curtains, pomegranate juice, Buddha Bar lounge-pop, and yoga at sunrise, sunset and any time in between.

The groupies This is Christina Ong territory – her guests are into lifestyle zen. Elle and co were here in the early days. Now no one wants to acknowledge anyone else. Not in a bad way – they're just too busy smooching.

The highs Breakfast is spectacular (that passion-fruity, yoghurt thing and the home-made granola that Ong hotels do so well) and delivered to your door, so you eat on deck overlooking the fabulous lagoon. The staff are amazing; they'll get to know your rhythms and

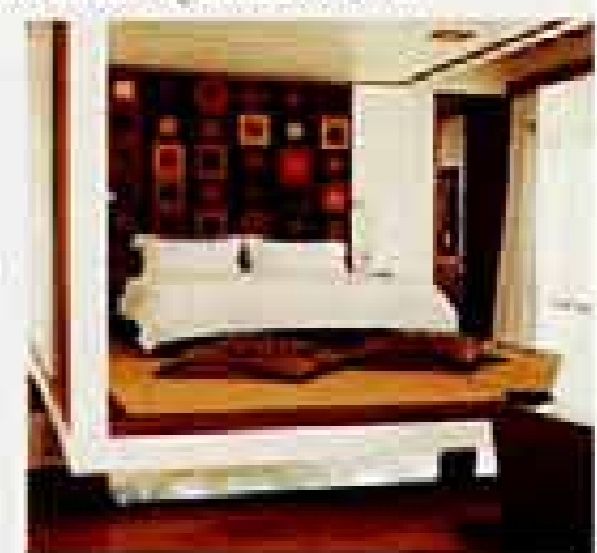
are very discreet, so you won't bump into them as they turn down the beds. Lord, they're sensational at tidying!

They'll take beautiful lunches out to the sandbar in the sea – in wheelbarrows – and if there's a therapist you like, you can get her/him to do all your treatments.

The shop is an island version of the one next to Club 55 in St Tropez – amazing bags, cool bikinis, tiny but divine bracelets that cost a bomb. The whole place smells absurdly delicious.

The lows If you're not in a suite, you're rubbing shoulders with next-door's deck. You're bound to the fancy restaurant menu, which is probably more expensive than the Fat Duck.

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ELLE
MACHERSON

RESEARCH PICTURE: SQUASHP