

## The Daily Telegraph

THE NO NEWS, NO SHOES CONCEPT IS, UNSURPRISINGLY, A HIT WITH THOSE SEEKING A TOTAL ESCAPE

### Barefoot luxury

Paradise comes in different shapes and forms for different travellers: luxurious, chic, rustic, adventurous. But there is one type of paradise in the Maldives that no other destination can replicate – barefoot luxury.

One resort invented the idea: Soneva Fushi. From the day the resort opened, its owners wanted to offer guests the true Robinson Crusoe experience and created the “no news, no shoes” concept. This means you won’t be delivered a newspaper, mobile phones are banned from communal areas, and you don’t need to wear shoes to dinner.

Unsurprisingly, it’s a hit with those seeking a total escape.

The decor of the resort is just as relaxed. It has a rustic

elegance that’s all down to the clever use of local woods and natural materials in the bar and restaurants.

Paradise should be perfect, but it’s nice to have the sand under your feet, too!

Another resort that works closely with local artists, and incorporates Maldivian design into its style is One & Only Kurumba. Children can take arts and crafts lessons, learning how to weave gorgeous, colourful mats with local fabrics and natural threads.

The villas are beautiful too, with vibrant handmade cushions and wooden carvings, making your stay a truly authentic encounter with the local culture.



Relaxed: Soneva Fushi offers a Robinson Crusoe experience with a rustic elegance, and excellent standards of service

### Enter another world

Are you up for an adventure? When you’ve seen enough sand, swam enough sea and read enough books, it’s time to see the other side of the Maldives – under the water.

If you’re an experienced diver, then you’ll know that the Maldives is one of the world’s top dive sites. If, however, you’re a novice you can learn to dive with other beginners and take things as slowly as you wish.

I started by taking guided snorkelling trips – offered by all the resorts – but some have made the underwater world their focus. Banyan Tree Vittorifaru, Baros and Angsana all boast the best reefs in the Maldives, starting with M1.

You’ll see baby sharks (shrimps), hawksbill turtles, anemones, parrot fish and sting rays.

If you’ve caught the snorkelling bug, go on a night snorkel and you’ll “see the Christmas lights come on” in the words of my instructor, where starfish change colour and neon squid light up in spectacular fluorescence.

All of this and more is possible if you learn to dive. Most resorts offer the option of taking your PADI dive course – it takes just four days – then you can dive independently.

Kurumba resort is a great place to learn, if you already know your stuff, take a boat trip into deeper waters where you can see manta rays, or take part in an eco-project and help marine biologists clean the reef. Of course, you can enjoy

marine wildlife without getting up close and personal. At Banyan Tree, marine lab staff feed huge stingrays daily while guests watch from the jetty.

Alternatively, kayak out to Banyan’s turtle sanctuary, where they invite guests to feed baby sea-green turtles that are being monitored before being released into the big wide world.

The truth is, whatever you decide you want from the Maldives – it’s possible.



Adventure: learn to scuba dive in the Maldives and discover spectacular underwater scenery