



The Gallivanter's Guide[©]



IDYLLIC PLACES FOR DEDICATED TRAVELLERS

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✓✓✓✓✓ One in a million	
✓✓✓✓ Extraordinary	
✓✓✓ Highly recommended	
✓✓ Well worth a visit	
✓ Good in parts	
✓ Go if you must	

The new Luxury?

If we are to believe the hoteliers, the new luxury is all about size; yet as we well know, when it comes to service, size does not matter.

Is luxury really all about the number of wines in the cellar, or is it more to do with the expertise behind their selection? After all, if you have an unlimited budget, then anyone can purchase a raft of expensive vintages, but it takes much more skill to select a really palatable house wine.

Is luxury dependent upon the size of the spa, or is it more to do with how good the therapists are, and how pure the products? Just about every press release we receive defines spas by their square footage. Ask yourself this, though; how often do you see a restaurant defined by its size? Normally, we hear about the talents of its chef, the quality of the produce, the innovative menus. When it comes to spas, however, hoteliers appear to believe that the bigger the spa, the better the experience.

Are service standards defined by the staff to guest ratio, or is it more to do with training? Well, it is certainly easier to operate a deluxe resort if you have plenty of staff, but only if that staff is trained immaculately. The best staff understands intuitively what guests require. 6 carefully selected well-trained staff members are worth 100% more than 24 casually hired hotel workers, who arrive with bad habits and tip-hungry hands.

Can luxury be defined by the size of the accommodation, or is it more to do with how that accommodation interacts with the guest; the ergonomics of room design? Size is irrelevant if you have to walk yards to the bathroom in the middle of the night, or if

the beautiful sofas are as hard as rocks, and the oversized fruit bowl decays steadily over a number of days.

Do we judge an hotel or resort by the number of stars it proclaims, or are we too canny to fall for the 6-star hype of the spin doctors? Are we to be told what to believe about every hotel we visit, or are we ready to think for ourselves, and if we disagree with a star rating, say so?

Ultimately, luxury is in the eye of the beholder. For some it means casual, pared down minimalism. For others, it is gilded, silken sybaritism, faded grandeur, and so on. What most up-scale guests agree on, though, is that the new luxury is all about privacy, space and personalisation. We do not want to be defined by the number on a room key. We do not want to be overlooked when frolicking in our private pool, and yes, we do want space, but only if it is designed to fulfil our needs.

The Wow Factors of hotel design, amenities and service should not be merely transient gimmicks; headline-grabbers in travel magazines that achieve a brief marketing edge. Real Wow Factors are thought-through guest benefits that consistently enhance the experience of a property; and that is why we have devoted this entire issue to the just-opened One & Only Maldives at Reethi Rah, because we believe that this resort has redefined the benchmark.

Editor/Publisher

Is this the world's best beach resort?



ONE & ONLY MALDIVES AT REETHI RAH.

Two years ago, we said that the Maldives had more exceptional beach resorts than anywhere else in the world. Today, that sentiment has been surpassed. There is no doubt in my mind that the just-opened One & Only Maldives at Reethi Rah is the best beach resort we have ever encountered.

Everything that you and I have often wished for is here; a private island with 12 totally secluded broad white sand beaches, edged by a perfectly clear turquoise lagoon; the horizon empty of almost anything, save for a line of white surf roaring on the distant reef. There is total quietude; the only sounds being the breeze rustling through the palms, the ocean waves and the occasional cry of a Heron; so tame that they

stand like sculptured sentinels on rocky outcrops, or even by one's breakfast table, hoping for a bento box of sashimi.

There is ultimate privacy here. The massive 109 acre island of Reethi Rah, which means 'beautiful island', is set on the protected northern edge of the North Malé atoll and has 6 km of pristine coastline all to itself. There are 130 stand-alone beach and overwater villas; each one 20 metres apart and measuring between 135 and 322 sq metres. That sounds like a lot of guests, but the island is so vast and meandering that it resembles a self-contained kingdom, so even when it is fully occupied, as it was when we stayed in September, it feels more like a sparsely populated Amanresort. 40 swimming pools;

37 of which are private, add to the lure; each infinity-edge pool sporting lava stone aqua beds, and ranging from 23 sq metres to 50 sq metres of lap-pool heaven.

For the very first time in this hotel group's short history, I would agree that this is truly a 'One and Only' resort. It captures the meaning of the moniker, the suggestion of unassailability; perhaps because this is the first One & Only property that has been conceived from scratch. Like a science fantasy novel, the group has created an entire world from almost nothing. The small island of Reethi Rah was made five times larger; an extraordinary feat of island engineering; yet one would never suspect that man had intervened, for this is a place filled with lush palms and



The sitting room of our Grand Beach Villa, #123, that can be closed off by sliding across the bedroom and bathroom doors, or opened out onto the pool terrace.



tect, Jean-Michel Gathy, has created the largest, most spectacular resort villas ever seen. The details are endlessly jaw-dropping; the customisation astounding, from pillow types and the essential oils in your bath-side burner, to the daily provision of your favourite fruits. Toiletries are by Lady Primrose of Dallas, but if you want something more natural, then there is a custom South Island range from New Zealand.

Here, you are spoiled beyond belief, indulged in every sybaritic pleasure that is still legal. No, Reethi Rah would not appeal to the back-to-nature crowd, but oh, it is the apogee of island chic and comfort; from the softest posturepedic beds with 3 inch mattress toppers, 300 thread-count Egyptian linens and goosedown duvets, to a choice of two robes; one a buttery towelling-lined Robe Works; the other a light apricot and grey cotton.

At Reethi Rah, there is a coffee table book of experiences; far too many to recount in these pages. There is no desire to island hop, to move on, for there is so much to occupy the days and nights; a myriad of contrasts and surprises.

Just about every key hotel worker in the region applied to work here. This was the dream job; but only the best were chosen, and as we went from restaurant, to villa, to pool, familiar faces smiled in recognition; the head of Villa Hosts, Budi Prihardjanto, remembered from The Dharma-wangsa in Jakarta; top notch restaurant staff from Taj Exotica Maldives and Four Seasons Kuda Huraa; and Executive Chef,

Stefano Artosin, straight from the arms of Amanpuri, and now overseeing more than 50 talented chefs in seemingly effortless style. The dream team was here, rounded up from the world's best by General Manager, Michael Luible; one of the greatest perfectionists I know; Reethi Rah an astounding achievement that most General Managers can only fantasise about.

If I were an hotel investor, I would see Reethi Rah as the next great resort benchmark; the 21st Century equivalent of Aman-



One of the resort's many lush jungle lanes.

puri, and I would want to create another One & Only in this ilk, for the group has certainly shown us what it can do when there are no creative or ownership restrictions.

Service is immaculate, warm and perfectly prescient. Our delightful Villa Host, Heri Setiawan, hails from Bali, and after just a day, he is part of the family; always on time, never intrusive, and totally organised; so good, in fact, that we still miss him.

plantings, so skillfully crafted by leading landscape guru, Bill Bensley, that you are convinced that this big island has been here for ever. Broad, winding white sand lanes are overhung with verdancy; splashes of red and purple punctuating the jungle; ancient-looking black volcanic sculptures, tall pock-marked wood-en spires rising from the sand; stone wheels and symbols becoming signposts to the restaurants, the spa, the children's club, the dive centre, the tennis courts, and so on.

Imagine the perfect combination of Amanresorts' design and Four Seasons' service, and you have One & Only Reethi Rah. Adrian Zecha's current favourite archi-



*General Manager,
Michael Luible.*



View from the bedroom of Grand Beach Villa, #123, looking towards the sitting room.



We have two bicycles outside our villa, but we are tired from travel and work, so Heri chauffeurs us hither and thither in our private buggy, weaving through the sandy lanes to breakfast at the stunning Reethi Restaurant, with its triple-glazed windowed wine cellar, stocking over 450 carefully selected labels, and its soaring Balinese style central area spilling out to edge-of-water alfresco tables; the turquoise lagoon mesmerising. There are none of the usual Maldivian style buffets here, just world class cook-to-order à la carte; on time and utterly delicious; the produce focusing on the finest organics available, including organically reared lamb and beef, and fish flown in twice a week from Tokyo. My double espresso arrives before I have time to ask; a perfect Maldivian omelette like a light envelope of folded fluffiness; eggs that taste straight from the hen; just-squeezed juices and home-made preserves. Our necks swivel constantly to take in the extraordinary quality of the design, the sheer originality, scale and excellence of the pristine display kitchen and the glass-boxed preparation area. If this restaurant were in New York, it would be a sensation. Here, in the midst of the Indian Ocean, it is a miracle.

After breakfast, we wander through the cool, pool-view Rah Bar, set between the lagoon and the long infinity-edge lap pool. You would think that one main pool would be sufficient, but no, there is also a dark, circling freeform pool within the gardens, awash with purple plantings and lazy swimmers; their eyes drinking in the endless turquoise lagoon that fills every frame. Later, we have lunch at the Rah Bar and discover an inspired selection of Rosé wines, many of which I rarely see outside of France. I could not be more content.

As well as the Rah Bar, there are three further restaurants to choose from here, although given the sheer size of the accommodation, many guests opt to dine in the seclusion of their villas, where private dinners can be arranged, cooked by a chef with a mobile oven from one of the 8 private pantries dotted around the island. Because every villa boasts ample outdoor dining areas, private parties, romantic meals à deux, and family banquets are all



1. A Heron arrives for breakfast on the Reethi Restaurant terrace. 2. View from the Tapasake restaurant at night. 3. Entrance to the Orchid Garden. 4. Interior of the Reethi Restaurant. 5. Cold Mezze at the alfresco Fanditha restaurant. 6. The preparation display kitchen at the Reethi Restaurant. 7. Entrance to the Spa. 8. A foot bath ritual, performed by our Villa Host, awaits our arrival at Grand Beach Villa, #123.



The Rab Bar looks out onto the lagoon, with the main lap pool to the right.

easily accomplished. Frankly, though, the quality of the restaurants here is so exceptional that David and I went out every evening to try something new. Perhaps the most elegant restaurant is Tapasake, where Japanese chef, Hiro Nakamuro has created a superb, light modern menu of small tasting dishes, including top notch Nigiri and Norimaki Sushi, Sashimi, grills and a raft of tempting vegetable, steamed and fried dishes, such as Crispy fried chicken with wasabi mayonnaise and chives, Steamed asparagus with mustard dressing, Tuna marinated in zuke with miso vinaigrette, and seriously good desserts, from freshly made sorbets and granité (try the green apple and wasabi sorbet), to Valrhona 'Jivara' chocolate fingers with coconut and tofu dip. To complement all this, there is the largest list of saki I have ever seen outside of Tokyo, and a carte of very cleverly chosen wines to match the Japanese Tapas fare. Never have I experienced such sophisticated cuisine in a resort setting. Never have I seen such an elegant restaurant as this; tall, cathedral ceilings, perfectly lit tables, chic bar areas, and cuisine to make every city, from London to Tokyo, green with envy.

As with all the restaurants here, there is also a special Kid's Only menu that, happily, does not begin and end with fish fin-

gers, recognising that discerning children have well educated palates. For instance, at the Reethi Restaurant, Kid's dishes include Wok-fried chicken with vegetables and cashew nuts, Vegetarian rice with soy and poached egg, and Teriyaki grilled red snapper fillet with steamed rice and vegetables. The adult cuisine at the Reethi Restaurant is even more tempting, with authentically excellent dishes emanating from Italy, Thailand, Vietnam, India, and, of course, the Maldives, where the curries are legendary. There are, it seems, no compromises at One & Only Reethi Rah.

The third main dining option is the gloriously Bohemian Fanditha; a Moroccan style alfresco encampment in the sand. This laid-back idyll, dotted with tête à tête thatched champacovered tables, low cushioned reclining areas and chic artifacts acquired in India and the Middle East, is Chef, Issa al Arab's tribute to the best Lebanese cuisine. The portions are so large that I recommend you order a cold and hot Lebanese mezze between two for your entire meal, as anything more requires at least two hours in the fitness facility. Buy a silky next-season kaftan and Indian sandals from the excellent Reethi Rah

boutique and hang out here until late, dining on mezze and bar-becued meats, just-caught fish, and vege-tables, until the mood changes, the music begins and the night owls take over. St. Tropez, eat your heart out.

Amazingly, this resort caters, without compromise, to everyone; from twenty-something honeymooners, to seventy-something retirees, and everybody in between. Families with children are equally cherished; the KidsOne facility being easily the best children's club I have encountered, including mini pool loungers, swimming pool, computer stations, cookery classes and a smart kid's café. Teens, meanwhile, have access to a huge range of activities at the Club One recreation area, including nighttime tennis challenges, bonfires-



Our Villa Host, Heri.

on-the-beach and dance parties. Watersport fanatics will be equally entranced with the resort's PADI Dive Centre, replete with nitrox, rebreathers and underwater scooters. On the activity side, there is everything from catamaran sailing, excursions and cruises on deluxe yachts, to an international tennis centre with Peter Burwash Academy, a state of the art technogym, with the extraordinary and



The bar area of the dinner-only Fanditha alfresco restaurant, seen during set-up.



rarely seen Kinesis full-gravity equipment, and of course, on the southern curve of the island, a serious 9,500 sq metre spa with a very good café serving energy-giving herbal cocktails. Something more adventurous and natural than ESPA would have been nice, but frankly, most of you will be entranced by this place, especially the two over-water spa suites and the beautiful Bill Bensley gardens. Talking of gardens, this island has its own Orchid Garden; a collaboration between London florist, Stephen Woodhams and 75-year old orchid guru, L.S. Wanigatunga. The garden grows around 7 varieties which grace the resort's villas and public areas; the 7 Grand Villas named after each variety of orchid grown here. The second garden, although in its infancy when we stayed, is destined for fresh organic vegetables and herbs and will, eventually, also become part of the cooking school experience.

So where will you stay? Well, even the standard accommodation, such as #184, beats most suites; each of the 54, 135 sq. metre beach villas a splendidly private and

This page from top: The second, freeform pool area sits within lushly planted gardens. Grand 2-bedroom Beach Villa, #147. Bathroom of Grand Beach Villa, #123. Deck and private pool of #123. View of the private beach frontage of Grand Beach Villa, #123.



Romantic overwater villas sit in pristine isolation and offer considerable privacy.

sumptuous retreat, with large terraces and direct access to the lagoon; and let's face it, when you have 12 beaches to choose from, nobody loses out. Of the beach villas, 27 have their own infinity edge pool and canopied day bed. Then there are the overwater suites with their super private solarium platforms, ocean hammocks and endless lagoon vistas. These are set in clusters of four; each boasting 145 sq. metres of space; 75 sq. metres of which is interior. Facing westward are the two Grand Water Villas, #154 and #166, which also offer

Palm Beach, and frankly, we could have spent a month here, such was the standard of comfort and service. After the 45 minute boat transfer from Malé, you are welcomed on the arrival jetty, led through the soaring reception pavilion, and thence



Ocean hammocks in a Grand Water Villa.

are transported by buggy to your own private world; a welcome foot-bath prepared by your Villa Host to ease the jet-lag.

Jean-Michel Gathy's cathedral-height architecture is jaw-dropping, yet because the fully airconditioned interiors are arranged in cosy residential style areas, you never feel overwhelmed by the size. Like at home, there is everything on hand, from a lap-top computer on the desk to a splendid bathroom with facing Duravit bowl sinks, a huge sunken tub flanked with candles, a separate loo and a large walk-in shower room with rainfall and hand-showers, controlled, sensibly, from faucets by the door. There is even a small window looking onto the lagoon.

Ample wardrobe space swallows one's resort wear, and at turndown, bedcovers and cushions are stowed in concealed mirrored cupboards. All those little niggles that we normally have in resorts have been thought about and resolved. For in-

stance, there is a separate dressing table area with mirror and hairdryer, recognising that most women do not want to put on makeup in a steamy bathroom. There are dimmers everywhere, so you can be in complete control of the lighting levels and also find your way to the bathroom in the middle of the night. There are an infinite number of places to relax in; my favourite being the hammock strung between palm trees on our private stretch of beach, and the carved in-pool seat. Breakfast on the terrace is a delight, or indeed indoors, for the views are equally mesmerizing; the decorative details including coconut wood boiserie surfaces, woven screens, terrazzo floors divided by timber inserts, and a host of collectible artifacts and accessories that reinforce the residential feel.

Even though this resort only opened in May 2005, already there is nothing in the entire world that gets close to One & Only Reethi Rah. It is, truly, one in a million. Do go.

Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★



Private infinity-edge pool in a Grand Water Villa.

sizeable infinity edge pools that appear to merge with the lagoon. 6 'duplex' villas, of which 3 have private pools (#142, #163 & #173), offer extremely spacious family accommodation, comprising a kingsize villa and twin queen villa and divan. Of the Grand Beach Villas, two offer one kingsize bedroom, whilst three have two double bedrooms and bathrooms, such as #147. All Grand Beach Villas have private pools, and it is this accommodation that is definitely my favourite, because although it is fun to have an overwater villa, in the Maldives it is a real treat to have so much white sand beach all to oneself.

We stayed in Grand Beach Villa #123 on



The chic pool area at KidsOne, replete with mini-loungers, water slide and top notch professional staff.

AT A GLANCE

ONE & ONLY MALDIVES AT REETHI RAH.

Tel: +960 6648800. **Fax:** +960 664 8822. **Internet:** www.oneandonlyresorts.com **Affiliation:** One & Only Resorts. **Rooms:** 130 Villa Suites. **Approx Rates:** Beach Villas: US\$680-1,200. Beach Villas with Pool: US\$905-1,500. 2-bed Duplex Villas: US\$1,360-2,400. 2-bed Duplex Villas with Pool: US\$1,615-2,700. 1-bed Grand Beach Villas: US\$1,750-2,900. 2-bed Grand Beach Villas: US\$2,280-3,600. Water Villas: US\$1,065-1,700. Grand Water Villas, with Pool: US\$2,135-3,400, including full American breakfast for two people, + 10% service & Maldivian Bed Tax of US\$8 per person per night. Airport transfers via launch: US\$100 per adult. Rates vary according to season and festive periods.

GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



AT LONG LAST, the Fifth Edition of our book, **The Ultimate Hotel Guide** has arrived from the printers, just in time to make **the perfect gift** for the Holidays and Christmas. Now in full colour, and with hundreds of original photographs and drawings by David Maslin, this book contains the ultimate hotel advice, with 136 hotels and resorts in 47 countries. Priced at £35, plus postage and packing, according to your country of residence, you can order your copies by faxing or posting the enclosed form to us now. I do hope you enjoy it!

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE DESPERATE for more up-scale family options in Europe, the just-opened **Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort** could be the answer. Set on over 4 hectares of Monaco's Larvotto peninsula, this rather elegant 337-room L-shaped resort, with interiors by Pierre-Yves Rochon and an extensive Cinq Mondes spa, is designed to be child friendly, including wet beaches and a 700 square metre pool. Couples will appreciate the 10 split-level apartments, whilst families should opt for the 8 two-bedroom suites or the 2-bedroom Roquebrune rooftop suite, replete with Turkish bath and panoramic views. www.montecarlobay.com

NEW HOTELS SCHEDULED TO OPEN in 2006 include Firmdale's **Haymarket Hotel** in London, which is set for late 2006 and will include a 20 metre pool with bar, lounge area and starburst ceiling. www.firmdalehotels.com. The Stein Group will open their second hotel in Mallorca in February 2006. **Gran Hotel Son Julia**, in the centre of the island, will complement the existing Son Net property, with 24 individually designed rooms and suites set in a 15th Century mansion. www.thesteingroup.com. Rocco Forte Hotels are intent on bringing more up-scale hotels to Germany. Early 2006 sees the opening of **Villa Kennedy** in Frankfurt, with 163 rooms, including 33 suites and a vast Presidential of 300 square metres. Summer 2006 sees the opening of Forte's **Hotel de Rome** in Berlin, with 146 rooms including 42 suites and a Presidential overlooking Bebelplatz. A third German property, **Hotel Ludwig**, is scheduled to open in Spring 2007 in Munich. www.roccofortehotels.com.

NEW YORK HAS EMBRACED THE FRENCH, with the announcement that **Four Seasons Hotel New York** will open **L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon** in Spring 2006; a casually elegant restaurant designed by Pierre-Yves Rochon, who was also responsible for Chef Robuchon's eponymous Paris establishment.

TEENAGERS NOW HAVE THEIR OWN CONCIERGE at **Four Seasons Hotel London**. The concept of the **Teen Concierge** was introduced in the Summer holidays to give young people an insight into London's coolest shops, sights and restaurants. As the youngest Four Seasons' employee ever, the 16-year old girl who worked the desk this Summer is, no doubt, destined to become a Four Seasons veteran. I have always suspected that Four Seasons breed their amazing staff. It seems that I may have been right! Concierge desk: +44 (0)20 7499 0888.

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