



Gallivanter's Guide

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IDYLIC PLACES FOR DEDICATED TRAVELLERS

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★★★★ Extraordinary	
★★★★ Highly recommended	
★★★ Well worth a visit	
★★ Good in parts	
★ Go if you must	

2000. Whose celebration is it?

Throughout this year, I have received enough Millennium press releases to build my own Millennium Dome. Many detail expensive packages that include various commemorative items and incentives, from champagne flutes to gold watches and private jet transportation.

Most of the hotel industry has been in a state of high excitement for months, rubbing its collective hands in glee as it muses upon the rich pickings to be had, especially from the world's top travellers. It is interesting, therefore, that not a single reader, from Europe and North America, to South America, Africa, Asia and Australia has asked me to recommend a Millennium experience. Not one.

It appears that most readers are travelling just before the late December/January peak, or just after in late January and early February. Generally, you are not flying during the Millennium period, but are either celebrating at home, not celebrating at all, or going to an hotel or restaurant in your own neighbourhood.

Here in the UK, ticket sales for the much-hyped Millennium Dome in Greenwich, proved an embarrassing flop when they went on sale in late September, which reminded me of Hong Kong's miscalculation, post-handover, when only a tiny fraction of estimated visitors materialised.

When will tourist authorities and hoteliers learn that one cannot take anything for granted? Some of the simplest and seemingly inconsequential things can affect how, when or if people decide to travel.

The rumours about the Millennium Bug causing havoc with some of the world's

more remote air traffic control systems have been enough to curtail the plans of even the more adventurous travellers. British Airways had to cancel 159 short-haul and 37 long-haul flights on New Year's Eve, whereas travel before and after the Millennium period remains healthy.

Intelligent travellers such as you, dear readers, know when you are being manipulated and over-charged and in most cases, very sensibly, refuse to play the game. One wonders, therefore, what sort of research led the world's various authorities to believe that the dawn of 2000 would be fundamentally different from any other New Year celebration, especially when most people over 30 tend to be ambivalent about celebrating the passing of another year.

Happily, 2000 *will* herald the opening of numerous exciting up-scale hotels and resorts worldwide and David and I are already discussing a raft of new itineraries to whet your appetites. In last month's issue, we included a voting form for The Gallivanter's Awards for Excellence. Right at the end, there is a space for you to tell us where *you* want to journey to next. If you have not done so already, do fill it in, as we take your views very seriously.

As an example; after dozens of enquiries about Mauritius, we are going there next month; returning *before* the Millennium, of course!

Editor/Publisher

The MALDIVES

IN A COUNTRY THAT CONSISTS SOLELY OF PRIVATE ISLANDS,
WE BRING YOU THE TWO MOST MAGICAL.

Out of a series of 1,200 tiny, low-lying Maldivian islands that swirl like turquoise necklaces in far-flung circular Atolls, around 70 are occupied solely by resorts; just one to each island. The non-resort islands are either completely uninhabited, or house the local, Muslim population. Consequently, you are not allowed to bring alcohol or video tapes into Malé airport; but do not fret, for once you are ensconced in your resort, there are all the Champagnes, fine wines, video libraries and five star comforts you could wish for.

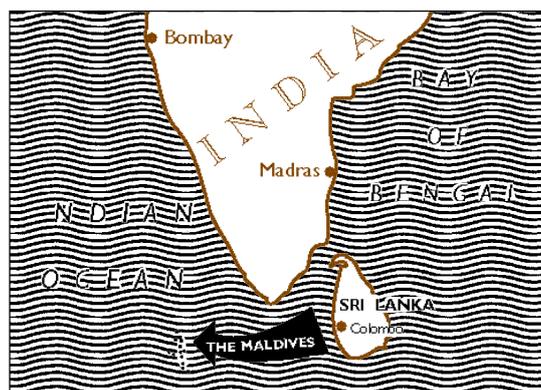
Only a tiny handful of resorts manage to respect both their guests and their God-given habitat, which is why there are but two that warrant our attention here.

Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa.

The art of doing nothing takes practice, so when Four Seasons took over this resort 18 months ago, I knew that Kuda Huraa was destined to provide exactly the right level of laid-back luxury that we sybarites crave.

The first difference you notice is the ease of the transfer. Malé airport has not changed since our first visit. It is still a bureaucratic cacophony of form-stamping fervour; outside, the various resort staff jostling with hundreds of tired tourists who, invariably, have stayed up all night to catch one of the impossibly-timed flights. Still, in my experience, some of the most memorable beach resorts are only reached via a series of labyrinthine obstacles. It takes a little stoic dedication to attain Paradise; and Paradise it is.

Delightful front-desk manager, Sunil Narang, latterly of the Leela Palace, Goa, gathered together his new guests and,



dispelling all concerns, all tiredness, all confusion, led us like children to the large Four Seasons motor cruiser, leaving the hordes and the hassles behind as the boat sped across the waters and we cooled our brows with iced towels and sipped chilled mineral water. Paradise was in reach and 30 minutes later, Kuda Huraa came into view; a verdant turquoise island edged by the whitest sand imaginable.

The guests craned their necks and cooed appreciatively, suddenly finding energy to leap off the boat to the thatched jetty pavilion and hurry towards the open-sided lobby where more cold towels and cool fruit cocktails awaited to ease a little simple form-filling.

Kuda Huraa is a small world unto itself; an island kingdom devoid of day-trippers, sightseers or casual diners, with only a small population of guests to please and pamper.

Cleverly, they have extended the size of this long, sausage-shaped island by building 38 overwater bungalows that jut out into the lagoon from the southern tip and extend again from the tiny *Reef Island*. Amongst these bungalows, there are four suites; the most private being the two furthest, #419 and #319, both of which have awe-inspiring lagoon views. Ours, #319, was, like all the overwaters, still unrefurbished; but charming American GM,

Ramesh Sadhwani hopes to have renovated all the accommodation by Autumn 2000. However, do not be put off, as even unrefurbished, these are *very* comfortable habitats and only lack the Four Seasons panache, which judging by some of the work we saw last month, will be truly spectacular.

Suite #319 offered a huge amount of privacy and space, including two bathrooms and serious floor-to-ceiling views across the shimmering waters; the occasional pinprick of an island rising from the shallows; one so close that we could swim to it and bask on the white sand of our own private mini-island.

The suite faced south and from the big cathedral ceiling sitting room, with its soft cream calico daybeds, sliding louvered doors opened onto a large deck, set with table, chairs and loungers. From here, one could descend the steps to a lower platform, equipped with a private outdoor shower; slipping effortlessly into the crystal clear lagoon.

The view was also captured from the bedroom, with its enormous custom-made super-kingsize, and even the main bathroom was a picture postcard of Paradise; the jacuzzi tub framing a perfect square of lagoon and the big tiled step-in shower positioned so that one could gaze outside. Twin marbled vanities, loo and bidet completed the picture and we were honoured to be the first guests to see Four Seasons' newly created toiletries; exquisite jars and bottles in deep green ceramic, with Kuda Huraa's own precious logo impressed on the stoppers of each; inspired by an ancient Maldivian coin. Open closets lined the dressing room and everything, from private safe, good hairdryers, gorgeous deep-blue patterned robes and slippers, TV's and sound systems, to portable 'phones and

lush fruit bowls, was on hand. Given the usual rusticity of these islands, Kuda Huraa is the Prada handbag of The Maldives.

On the island itself, we also spent some time in one of the just-completed Pool Bungalows, #134, which was lushly landscaped; white sand pathways leading from one's private garden to well positioned loungers and thatched *palapas* set on the snowy beach. Bleached wood decking defined the space; a big stepped plunge pool overhung by shady palms and tiled in local stone which merged into the landscape. These newly modelled habitats are coloured in pale terracotta; a bolstered blue and cream daybed set in the shade, where a Marrakech-blue trellis defines the view beyond. Inside, all is calm, cool minimalist chic; a huge custom-made super-kingsize draped with a burgundy and gold silk throw and soft cream netted canopy; the cathedral ceiling up-lit and the floors rustic terracotta.

A small bathroom with a tiny in-tub shower and single vanity leads out onto a wonderfully tranquil outdoor shower area, dressed with a giant amphora of bright purple floating water lilies; a frangipani tree weaving its white fragrant blossoms through the overhanging thatch.

These inland bungalows tend to be dark and shaded, designed to keep cool (with the help of airconditioning, of course!), so do not expect windows and big views. If you want that, then opt for an overwater bungalow. Do not, however, book anything less than a Pool Bungalow as the standard accommodation could disappoint.

We also viewed the new 2-bedroom Pool Villa; a really excellent suite with the largest private plunge pool on the island; the airy accommodation offering two full bedrooms and bathrooms and a central sitting room. Aim to book up early as this suite will be very popular indeed.

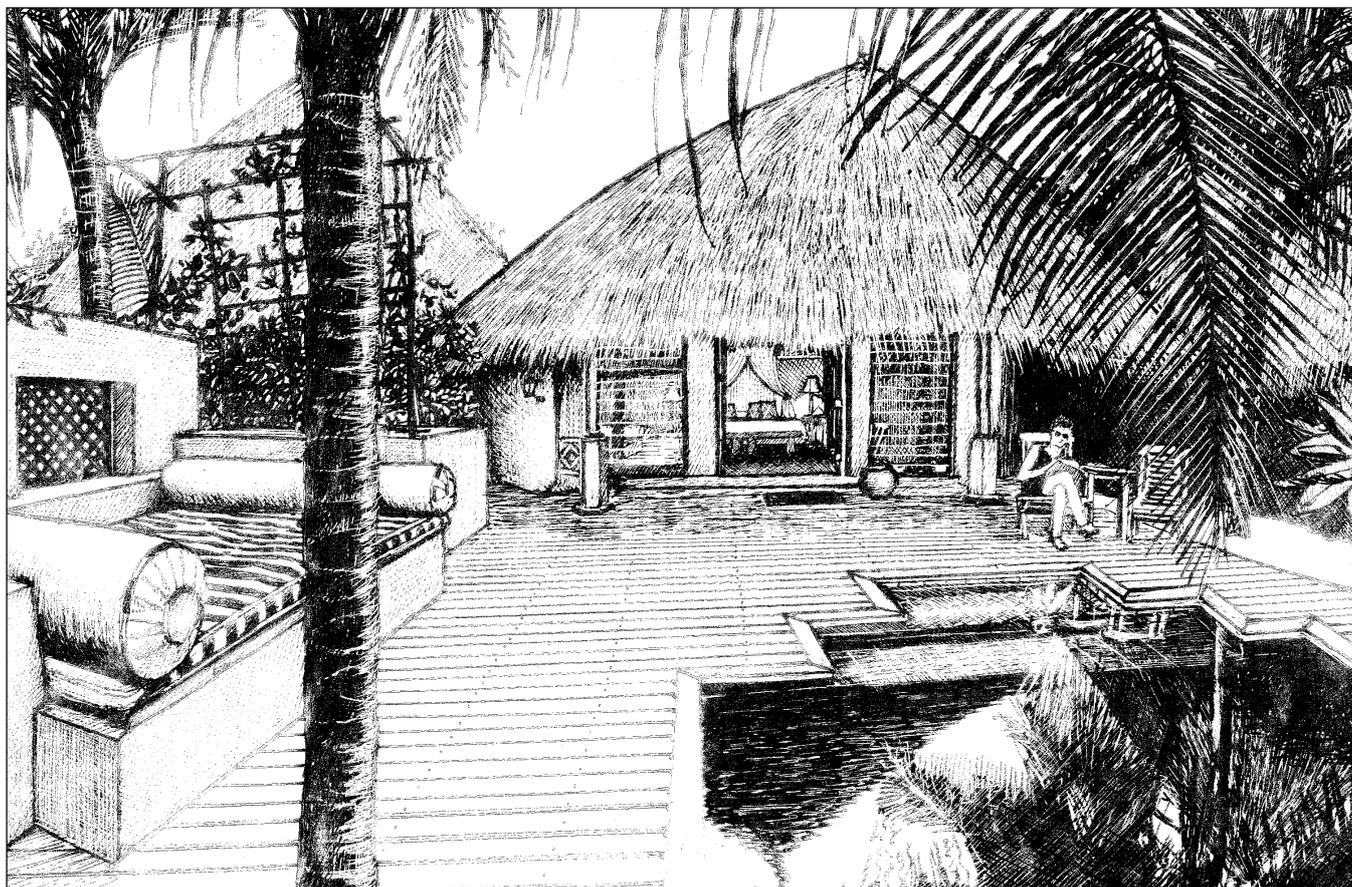
Predictably, watersports are the most popular pursuit here and Kuda Huraa offers perhaps the most sophisticated PADI diving operation in the islands. Uniquely, they even have a special introductory diving experience for those of us who have never tried the sport before.

Despite the utter tranquillity of the waters in these parts, for guests who prefer the security of a swimming pool, the resort has the best in the Maldives; a huge, infinity-edge curve of water that merges seamlessly with the lagoon beyond; the shallows graduated like the shore of a beach, and shaded pavilions, tented areas and an elegant

swim-up bar creating a fabulous experience. From here, you can take lunch by the pool or wander into the *Cafe Huraa*, which serves a superb variety of menus, from breakfast to dinner, with everything from local delicacies to pizzas.

New chef, Jamie Jones (ex-Four Seasons London) is a true enthusiast, and together with Irish Food & Beverage Manager, Alastair McAlpine (ex-Regent Hong Kong), they have created perhaps the most sophisticated cuisine in the islands. Apart from *Cafe Huraa*, there is also the stylish *Bara-bará Restaurant*, serving innovative and utterly delicious Indian and Maldivian-inspired cuisine. Try the wondrous Maldivian Mas Rosh, with tuna and stir-fried greens, banana chutney and mild curry sauce, the Reef Lobster Biriyani, the Yellow Dal Tadka and Dal Makhani. Then try to make up your mind which home-made ice-cream or sorbet to sample. I loved the Balsamic and Rosemary, the Cardamom and the Banana Dark Chocolate; but then, I also loved the Mango, the Black Pepper the.... see what I mean?

For European-style fare, there is the smart *Reef Club*, set at the other end of the island by the water bungalows. Yes, there is a lot of walking if you stay in a water bungalow,



One of the beautiful new Beach Bungalows with its own private pool makes for a super-private hideaway at Four Seasons Kuda Huraa.

but if you simply cannot take the exercise, then a simple 'phone call will summon a golf buggy instantly to transport you wherever you wish. At the *Reef Club*, the water bungalow guests enjoy a private Club breakfast every day; a distinctive buffet served from blue and yellow Moroccan tajines. The restaurant is open to everyone at dinner and once again, the cuisine is exceptionally good. We especially liked the Berek's Lamb Pockets with pine nuts and marinated cheese salad, the Whole Baked Reef Fish and Vegetables, Lamb Cutlets with Goat Cheese Soufflé and Tarragon Sauce and yet more tempting desserts, such as Coffee and Frangelico Tiramisu.

Here, everything is fresh. All the breads are baked on site and range from delicious Naan to Focaccia, olive bread and French sticks. In-room dining is equally accomplished and David and I enjoyed perfect sushi and a ravishing Maldivian curry.

The *Nautilus Lounge* is a picturesque bar serving great espresso and every drink imaginable. Even the wine lists here are quite extensive; although you must expect fairly high prices, as import taxes are punishing. This also applies to 'phone calls, which is why I was pleased to find Internet facilities in the attractive Library.

For retail therapy, rest assured that Kuda Huraa's resort shop is a real treasure trove, with everything from Pashmina shawls and silk evening bags to covetable resort-wear originals and a great range of crafts and gifts. Our own luggage grew by the day!

For workout-aholics, there is an extensively equipped gym overlooking the pool and ocean; at present connected to a modest spa. The most exciting news of all is that the resort is currently building a new, unique spa on a tiny nearby island, which will be connected to the mainland by a jetty and custom-made *dhoni* ferry. We saw the plans for this and frankly, I cannot wait to return. There will be seven private over-water double treatment suites radiating out from the island; each suite offering a massage salon, outdoor massage deck overlooking the lagoon and a very large bathroom with tubs and showers. The spa will also have beauty and hair salons and a custom-designed range of products. It should be completed by April or May 2000, and as the dry season tends to range from late October to late April, it would be worth booking up now for next year, as I



The unique Raison d'Etire Spa at Soneva Fushi is the world's first holistic oasis.

know this resort is destined for fame.

Right now, still in its early stages of renovation, Kuda Huraa easily garners four plus ticks. When completed, I just know it will earn five.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓+

Soneva Fushi Resort.

A guest had left her reading glasses in the villa, so as she sat in the bar, cooling off after diving, she squinted at the menu, holding it at arm's length.

"Would you like reading glasses?"

She looked up at the smiling face and gasped in amazement as a selection of spectacles were proffered. Soneva Fushi is that sort of place. It is not a conventional resort, but has, over the past four years, evolved quite magically into a true home from home; perhaps because its owners, Sonu and Eva Shivdasani (he, Anglo-Indian and she Swedish) spend three months of the year here. It is their home, and for a week or two, it can be yours, too.

David and I first came here over three years ago. We loved it then, but now we are besotted. Sonu and Eva have persisted in their passion for this unspoilt, tropical idyll, and I have to report that persistence has triumphed, for Soneva Fushi has now matured into a wonderfully accomplished and caring hideaway; unique not just in the Maldives, but in the world.

Last month, we witnessed the opening of their second restaurant and bar, *The Dhuniye*, on the sunset side of lush, *Kunfunadboo Island*. We also saw the opening

of their wholly unique spa and gym, created and operated by the talented duo of Rosamand Freeman-Attwood and Alex Arnewid of *Raison d'Etire*. For some years now, I have longed for a resort to create a serious holistic spa rather than a superficial massage-cum-facial service. Many of us lead such stressful lives that we require rather more than a half hour's reflexology from a just-trained girl. Before this, I had never found such a therapist as Mia outside a Chiropractic clinic; but here at Soneva Fushi, the *Raison d'Etire* team are all highly experienced practitioners, drawn from England, Sweden and Thailand to individually supervise your well-being. Here, you do not choose treatments like food from a menu. Here, you undergo a proper assessment that determines your needs. It may be that you are put into the hands of a personal trainer to improve your posture or your confidence. It may be that your skeletal and muscular alignment needs correcting, your nutrition improving; or perhaps you just need to learn how to relax. Be assured, there is no strict regime here. Soneva Fushi is, first and foremost, an idyllic island resort. It is up to you whether you take advantage of all or just some of its relaxing properties.

David and I joined our good friend Kathie at Malé airport to take the *Hummingbird* seaplane to *Kunfunadboo Island*; a smooth and magical 30 minute flight across the jewelled islands of the remote *Baa Atoll*. Our Australian pilot touched down the sleek white *Caravan* float plane onto the lagoon, as the Soneva Fushi launch arrived

to ferry us to the sunrise jetty, where a group of relaxed, smiling staff awaited to greet us. Sonu, barefoot like everyone here and clad in shorts and tee-shirt, personally welcomed his new arrivals like old friends and his charming and extensively experienced GM, Alasdair Junor and his wife, Anna, who, quite obviously, care passionately about this place, enfolded us in the much improved Soneva experience.

Here, the GM's weekly cocktail party takes place on a sandbank in the middle of the ocean; a pleasant 10 minute boat ride away. Butler trays of delicious canapés are set up on the coral-strewn white sand, and sipping Champagne and Kir Royale, we watched the sky turn crimson as the sun dipped below the great curve of the horizon and asked ourselves if anything could ever compete.

Since our last visit, a series of new, even more beautiful Villa Suites have been tucked away on the sunset side of this 1.4km x 400m island, close to the excellent *Soleni Dive Centre*. This is one of the largest islands in The Maldives, yet there are still only 62 accommodations here; so sheltered by the thick jungle vegetation that the island appears totally deserted.

Upon arrival, every guest finds a bottle

of excellent French Champagne awaiting them in their room, together with a regularly refreshed bowl of tropical fruits; the unique rustic sophistication of the villas merging their bleached wood, thatch and white-walled curves into the mangrove trees, palms, banana plants, yuccas and frangipanis; the undergrowth rustling with tame chickens, black and white rabbits and curious geckoes. There are no predators here, so animals and guests live in utter harmony, and although mosquitoes can be a nuisance, they are not malarial and are easily repelled.

As we were a party of three, we stayed in the new *Owner's Complex* on the sunset side; an eclectically designed walled compound containing three exquisite villas. Kathie was in #60, which, although quite shady, had the best bathroom on the island; a massive semi-outdoor rustic retreat with a fabulous double step-in shower, free-standing tub and two-sided vanity that mirrored the jungle beyond.

David and I stayed next door in #61, the *Presidential Suite*—a very large 2-storey villa with winding staircases, rustic bridges that link living and sleeping areas, a big open-sided bathroom, study, full kitchen, indoor lounging area, servant's/child's room with shower-only bathroom and a glorious sitting and dining platform

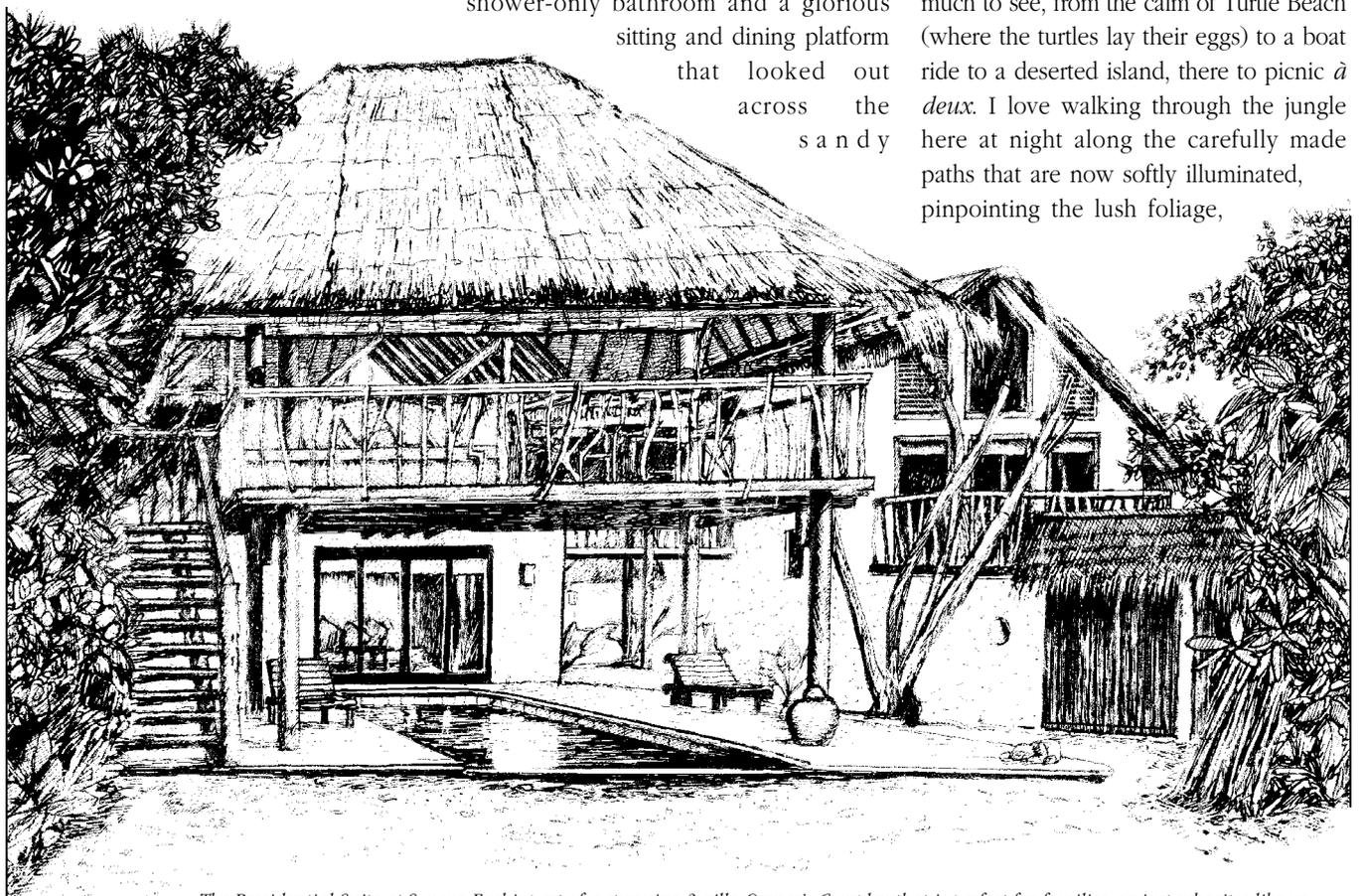
that looked out
across the
s a n d y

garden to the beach beyond, shading a large oblong plunge pool, tiled with pale celadon local stone. The third villa in the complex, #62, was also a duplex, but simpler and less spread out; possibly the nicest as it is very light and airy.

Although a fair distance from the main services (little Chinese bicycles are provided for all guests), this complex is an ideal choice for a family with nanny or for a group of friends; or you can book each villa separately if you do not require all three.

All the accommodation is set on the two shores of the island; the best beach being on the sunrise side, where the third phase of the resort's development will eventually take place; creating a second *Owner's Pool Villa* and more villa suites to replace the standard *Rebendi* rooms (hopefully with pools, as there is no main pool here). For you, dear reader, a *Soneva Fusbi Villa Suite* is a must, for they are an absolute delight to stay in; every light, chair and object so brilliantly designed by Eva, whose creativity and sensitivity to the island's ecology knows no bounds. Here, even the laundry is washed with biodegradable products.

Because the island is so large, one never feels hemmed in or bored as there is so much to see, from the calm of Turtle Beach (where the turtles lay their eggs) to a boat ride to a deserted island, there to picnic *à deux*. I love walking through the jungle here at night along the carefully made paths that are now softly illuminated, pinpointing the lush foliage,



The Presidential Suite at Soneva Fusbi; part of a stunning 3-villa Owner's Complex that is perfect for families, or just sybarites like us.

looking out for the *Eheree Ethaa* sign that means in local parlance "it is over t h e r e ". It is the essence of desert island life.

There are now three restaurant options to choose from. At breakfast and dinner, one may eat at the original sand-floored *Main Restaurant* on the sunrise side, lunch at the *Mibiree Mitha* beneath the trees, snack in the Bar with its oversized bamboo chairs; or in the evening, stroll to the just-opened *Dhuniye Restaurant*, where an exquisite dining experience awaits; the banquette tables set in a sweeping candlelit curve. Here, talented chef, Klaus Rauter's East-meets-West cuisine is so good that it is impossible to believe that one is on a far-flung desert island; Moreish Red Lentil Soup, Tender Chicken Breasts with Asparagus and Parma Ham on Bacon Jus, the freshest, most delicate fish, just-baked bread and light delectable desserts, from Orange Crème Brûlé to Chocolate Soufflé. Ah, but the wine list! This is no ordinary resort list, but a huge, exceptionally well-priced carte worthy of one of Europe's best restaurants. It helps, of course, if you own a vineyard or two in France, which the Shivdasanis do. From its ten Champagnes, to the 1976 double magnum Château Gruaud Larose 2eme Grand Cru Classe St. Julien, Heaven awaits one's palate.

At Soneva Fushi, personal service reigns, so if you want a TV in your room, just ask; a lightweight duvet, no problem; *dîner à deux* on a deserted island? All can be arranged; and when it was Kathie's birthday, Klaus helped me create a most magical Maldivian dinner, replete with cake; served on our dining pavilion by the delightful Farisha, who cooked it to order.

Two small but good boutiques, including a jewellery shop, provide for us shopaholics and if one fancies a little gentle exercise, then boules, volleyball and badminton complement the excellent water-sports on offer.

I was amazed at what this resort has achieved in three years. The new jungle-set *Raison d'Etire Spa* is a design masterpiece, a stunning oasis of calm; the entrance reached via stepping stones across a circular reflecting pool; each treatment room large and airy, with the natural slate walls trickling water into indoor rivers. Outside, across the impossibly white sand, a tunnel of trees leads to the beach, where breeze-cooled treatment

champas await for hedonistic massages. The level of care here is extraordinary. One guest, who had suffered from tennis elbow for years was cured by Mia in ten minutes. Indeed, I think that we were all transformed in some way by this place.

The *Raison d'Etire* team, like everything and everyone here, appear to be in perfect harmony with this island, and it shows. Everything now works wonderfully, from Anna Junor's carefully tended herb and vegetable gardens that provide the resort with fresh organic produce, to the almost silent remote-controlled airconditioning and the efficiently arranged seaplane transfers. If your international flight arrives during darkness, when the seaplanes cannot fly, the resort will arrange for you to spend the intervening hours at nearby Kuda Huraa or the Banyan Tree, which works really well.

Now truly special, Soneva Fushi is one of the world's must-stay private islands.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓

AT A GLANCE

FOUR SEASONS RESORT MALDIVES AT KUDA HURAA.

Address: North Malé Atoll. **Tel:** +960 444 888. **Fax:** +960 441 188. **Internet:** www.fourseasons.com **Affiliation:** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 106, inc. 5 suites. **Approx Rates:** *Beach Bungalow with Pool:* \$490-550. *Water Bungalow:* \$570-625. *Overwater Villa Suites:* \$850-\$950. *2-bed Beach Villa:* \$1,100-1,350, inc. breakfast, + 10% service & \$6 per person per night tax. *Return speedboat transfers:* \$70 p.p.

SONEVA FUSHI RESORT.

Address: c/o Bunny Holdings BVI Ltd, 2nd floor, 4/3, Faamudheri Magu Male. **Tel:** +960 230304/5. **Fax:** +960 230335 /230374. **Internet:** www.soneva-pavilion.com **Affiliation:** Small Luxury Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 62, inc. 7 suites. **Approx Rates:** *Deluxe Crusoe Villas:* \$314-819. *Soneva Fushi Villas:* \$399-1,024. *Soneva Fushi Villa Suites:* \$484-1,154. *Crusoe Suite:* \$574-1,284. *Presidential Suite:* \$649-1,414. *Owner's Complex (3 villas):* \$1,534-3,604, inc. tax & breakfast. *Return seaplane transfers:* \$170-260 p.p.

All rates expressed and charged in US\$. Rates vary considerably according to season.

Almost without exception, airport hotels are to be tolerated rather than enjoyed. You will never hear me recommend one save for the direst of circumstances, when no other alternative is available. So imagine my surprise when we discovered Langshott Manor; for who in their right mind creates an airport hotel from a manor house that dates from around 1580 and has just 15 rooms? Who fills it with four posters, draped bathtubs, French waiters and all those gorgeous little decorative details that one normally finds only in some Italianate palazzo? Who offers 24-hour room service with jet-lag snacks, a full meet-and-greet airport service with a complimentary return transfer and assistance with your travel arrangements, including checking and re-confirming flights? Who has an internationally experienced GM who trained as a chef and knows so much about wine that he lectures on Champagne? In an airport hotel? Yes, because Langshott Manor is a law unto itself; a true labour of love; a deliciously eccentric hideaway that exists to pamper the jet-weary traveller and remove them as far as possible from the humdrum. It succeeds brilliantly.

We arrived at Langshott in a state of pure unadulterated stress. Gatwick Airport, London's out-of-town Sussex-based hub, is the second largest in Europe. I loathe it, but occasionally it is the only option. As we live in Wiltshire, the drive back is very tiring, so we decided to try out the Langshott alternative; the hotel being a mere 8 minute's drive from the nightmare of Gatwick, right on the border of Surrey.

As you turn off the A23 into Ladbroke Road, the sudden appearance of pastoral landscape is instantly calming and when one pulls up outside the hotel, frightfully smart and professional staff rush out to collect one's luggage, say "there, there", and nanny one into the warmth of a post-airport womb that bears absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to air travel.

There are 7 rooms in the main house, 5 in the Garden Mews (formerly the Victorian stables) and 3 in the Racecourse Mews. Even the tiniest Single, *Hever*, is exceptionally well appointed and we found it really hard to pick a favourite as all Langshott's individually decorated habitats are very special indeed. That said, we loved

Europe's most civilised airport hotel

Arundel, a romantic attic-set Junior Suite with a huge double-alcoved tub and in-tub waterfall shower. We also liked *Wisley* in the Garden Mews; a full 2-room suite with a very large bathroom, and *Savill*, a junior suite-sized Deluxe Double set in the old hay loft that is strikingly decorated. Our absolute favourite, though, was *Sissinghurst* in the Garden Wing, with its mock four poster kingsize, inglenook fireplace, summer terrace and superb bathroom.

Our room, *Leeds*, was a bijou eclectic folly of theatrical red and gold drapes, leaded windows, four poster opulence and a really splendid biscuit marble bathroom; the four-poster bathtub (yes really) uniquely canopied in the centre of the room. Twin Victorian handbasins and a really good corner step-in shower made me pinch myself, for England is not generally known for its great bathrooms. England is also not known for too many great General Managers; yet here at Langshott, one discovers Kenneth Sharp; a very well travelled hotelier who has done everything from studying at *Cornell* to working in Indonesia.

Kenneth never hides in his office. He is a hands-on hotelier who greets you at the door, leaves a personalised welcome note in your room (complete with next day's weather forecast) and has a glint of enthusiasm in his eye that says he positively relishes his work.

Mainly French staff await to pamper you; a light, humourous atmosphere meaning that guests actually talk to each other here. The hotel is immaculately kept; a labyrinth of low beamed salons that epitomise Elizabethan England; although unlike the permissive 16th century, one may only smoke in the Bar here, so be warned.

The menu during our stay leant heavily towards seafood; a special gourmet lobster menu and a small but interesting *à la carte*, offering everything from beef and venison to fresh fish. Of course, if you crave something simpler, chef, Stephen Toward will oblige and Langshott's French Maître D', affectionately known as Fred, will take exceptional care to pace your chosen wine (ask Kenneth Sharp to recommend something special from



Our four-poster bathroom with a really powerful waterfall shower and lashings of biscuit marble.

his excellent list).

After an *amuse bouche* of crab and carrot cappuccino, which was delectable, I had a very reasonable Boudin of Chicken, and David was impressed by his Trio of Scottish Salmon. We both chose fish for our main course; halibut for me and roasted seabass for David; both of which were of prime quality, although I did find the lemon risotto a little sweet for my taste and I would have preferred an espresso rather than filter coffee.

Tired, we climbed the stairs to bed, noticing all the little details of the room, from a complimentary decanter of sherry to a box of home-baked shortbread. The Queensize four poster was comfortable and we woke to a sunny day; our chosen breakfast arriving on a big basket tray with excellent leaf tea, freshly squeezed orange juice, crisp toast and croissants, home-made preserves and good yogurt.

Although Langshott is an Elizabethan manor, unlike many historic hotels, it needs to make no excuses. Everything here is immaculate. The waterfall shower performed wonderfully; the fabrics and furniture were fresh and cared for. There were mini-bars and TV's all carefully concealed in period armoires, fresh flowers and, although there is no airconditioning, the mullion windows open to the English breezes that

waft across Langshott's extensive, award-winning flower gardens which are beautifully designed as a series of super private garden 'rooms'.

Next year will see a modest expansion. The tiny Bar will extend into the oak-panelled restaurant, thus doubling its size and a new restaurant and kitchens will be constructed in perfect Elizabethan style by the small bridged lake in the grounds; an idyllic setting, replete with a pair of swans and a weeping willow to gaze out upon.

Next time you are travelling to or from Gatwick, or even if you just fancy a weekend away exploring the region's historic gardens, castles and houses, do as we did and stop off at Langshott Manor. It is a real breath of fresh air.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

AT A GLANCE LANGSHOTT MANOR.

Address: Langshott, near Gatwick, Surrey, RH6 9LN. **Tel:** +44 (0)1293 786680. **Fax:** +44 (0)1293 783905. USA toll-free: 800 525 4800. **Internet:** www.slh.com/langshot/ **Affiliation:** Small Luxury Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 15, inc. 1 full suite, 2 juniors & 3 four posters. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* from £155. *Suites:* from £260, inc. tax, breakfast, newspaper, car parking for a week & transfer to Gatwick airport.

GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



ONE OF OUR FAVOURITE LONDON HOTELS is now even better equipped to serve your needs. The **Covent Garden Hotel** has extended its delightful brasserie into the neighbouring building and can now offer a private dining room, too. The hotel has also acquired extra space on its left hand side and by December, it will be able to offer 8 new rooms, a basement gym and a plush 55-seat screening theatre, also with private dining room. Meanwhile, owners, Firmdale, are busily creating a new hotel in London's Fitzrovia (just north of Oxford Street). Set in restaurant-rich Charlotte Street, the new **Charlotte Street Hotel** is scheduled to open in April 2000. Watch this space!

NEXT MONTH, DAVID AND I ARE OFF TO MAURITIUS to check out the island's wealth of new and refurbished resorts; but sadly, we will miss the opening of the new **Oberoi Mauritius**, which is scheduled to soft-open in July 2000, offering 76 Luxury Villas and Terrace Pavilions set in 20 acres on the northwest coast of Baie aux Tortues. The style sounds remarkably like the Oberois of Bali and Lombok and one wishes fervently that Oberoi would create something more in tune with their unique Rajvilas in Jaipur, which is easily the best Oberoi ever.

HAVING SOLD PRIMA HOTELS, HRI, who also own Leading Hotels of the World, have created a new affiliation this month to represent the world's 100 rooms or less, boutique-sized properties. Called, predictably, **The Leading Small Hotels of the World**, the new group currently offers a small but rather good membership list (just 25, in fact), ranging from gems such as The Widder in Zurich, The Lowell, New York, The Lancaster, Paris and The Datai in Langkawi, to the new Cuisinart Resort & Spa in Anguilla. Dare we hope that quality will continue to reign over commerce? You can check the members out on www.lhw.com or call 0800 181 123 from the UK, 1-800 409 063 from Ireland, +44 171 290 1000 from the Middle East and South Africa, or via your usual Leading Hotels of the World contact.

GREAT HOTELS NEVER STAND STILL and **Hôtel du Rhône** in Geneva continues to prove the point by introducing Movies on Demand; a much more sophisticated system than the usual Pay-TV, allowing guests to watch any of 22 films whenever they feel like it. The hotel has also introduced Innfax; a new system that gives each guest a personal in-room fax number, with brand new machines designed to be connected to laptops and used as colour printers and copiers.

EVERYONE SEEMS TO BE BUILDING NEW HOTELS in New York, and Mandarin Oriental are no exception, having just signed contracts to create the **Mandarin Oriental, New York**; a 250-room property which will be part of the prestigious Columbus Centre project, located on the site of the New York Coliseum at Columbus Circle, at southwest Central Park. However, you will have to wait until 2003 to stay there! Meanwhile, their 329-room Miami property, which is still under construction, is scheduled to open in October 2000.

The Gallivanter's Guide is a privately published monthly newsletter with the aim of unearthing idyllic places for the dedicated traveller. The selection of hotels and resorts included in this Guide is made on an entirely independent basis, and all opinions expressed are those of the Editor. Neither the Editor nor Publisher can be held responsible for any problems which may arise through the subscriber or reader's direct experience of any place, hotel or airline as recommended in this Guide. All information, including room rates, is published in good faith, and the Publishers cannot be held responsible for its accuracy. We recommend that you always double check all information with the hotels/authorities concerned.

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