

DELUXE

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FAST WOMAN
FAY MASCHLER
DITCHES DINING

NOT SO BASIC
BEACHES
BAHAMAS
MADAGASCAR
MALDIVES
& MALAYSIA



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POLLOI
WHAT TO PACK
FOR PARADISE

HAVING A
SNOW BALL
ON THE
POWDER WITH
THE PRIVATE
JET SET

IN THE CLUB
HOW SOHO
HOUSE WENT
GLOBAL

TRAVEL ✈️ ISSUE

(It's trippy, man)

Barefoot bliss
The sandbank off Soneva Fushi



'THE SAND IS PRISTINE, PALE AND SOFT. THE BATH-WARM SEA IS MORE BLINDINGLY TURQUOISE THAN PICTURES SUGGEST AND A CORAL REEF CIRCLES THE ISLAND'

Into the blue

Charlotte Ross hands her shoes to Man Friday and turns castaway on Kunfunadhoo

MALDIVES

Crashing through the moonlit Indian Ocean on the final leg of our journey to the island of Kunfunadhoo, the white-clad boathand politely but firmly confiscates our shoes. Our destination, more famous as the Maldivian resort of Soneva Fushi, is known for coining the term 'barefoot luxury' to describe its back-to-nature yet stealthily high-end vibe. Nonetheless we are surprised at how literally the motto is enforced. Assuming it to be a gimmick, and that we'll be back in our Birkenstocks by morning, we step on to the warm wood jetty and pad along powdery sand lanes to our villa.

Inside it is a glowing, glass-walled haven with more square footage than our London home. We flop gratefully on to the vast cushioned seating area before drifting between the sunken bath of the outdoor wetroom (which also features its own pond, jungle shower and resident fruit bat) and the observation deck, from where we can see the twinkling lights of a neighbouring island. Within an hour we are lulled into a welcome state of serenity by the sounds of the sea and whooping night birds. We climb into our four-poster coconut-frame bed and agree it was worth the particular challenge of a three-part overnight flight with a five-year-old to get here.

But it is the next day's sunrise that reveals how blessed we are. Through the sliding doors we take a dozen (barefoot) steps to the beach where the sand is pristine, pale and soft as snow. The bath-warm sea is more blindingly turquoise than pictures suggest and a coral reef circles the island just yards from the shore.

We are taken to breakfast by Inthi, our 'Man Friday', who miraculously appears whenever a question or a need arises. He pays particular attention to our daughter, as do all the staff on this fantasy island, calling her by her name and remembering her likes and dislikes.

As we weave through the maze of jungle lanes, Inthi points out key landmarks ('turn left at the banyan tree') and introduces us to the island's inhabitants, from the American sculptor who runs the glass-blowing studio to the on-site chocolatier, marine biologist and team behind the incredible kids' club – which has its own DJ deck, juice bar and Lego room.

But we decide to spend our time in this paradise as a family. Soon we are despatched across the sparkling ocean with a hamper for a day of enforced isolation on a tiny deserted island. After a mild sensation of panic on seeing our boat depart, we manage to relax, grazing on exotic delicacies, sipping iced beer and beachcombing the day away. The only other signs of life are scuttling hermit crabs, a few leaping fish and a passing dhoni.

A day later, we take to the sea at sunset in



High life A seating area and the observatory

the hope of spotting dolphins. To the sound of Maldivian drumming, we sip Prosecco and wait. Suddenly we see the silvery curve of dolphin backs as they dip and dive in glistening arcs beside our boat before sliding beneath the waves as the children whoop with delight.

Another evening is spent on the sandbank (left) taking cocktails with the other guests, and yet another on a trail through the island discovering stalls of Asian street food.

Before long, the days blur into one. We swim in the sea and we cycle the lanes on our comically rickety bikes, which have special pads on the pedals to save our soles. We eat our way around the island, from a treetop tasting menu during a tropical storm to the sushi restaurant where we learn to make our own California rolls. On my partner's birthday our beds are transformed into floral works of art. Did I mention the sublime spa? Where outdoor massages melt your muscles into sweet submission.

In between are moments of true magic, like the evening we find ourselves, beneath a full moon, in our own outdoor cinema, watching a Bob Hope and Bing Crosby film, while our daughter goes stargazing at the observatory in the trees. But I'd trade it all for the day I snorkel with dozens of manta rays in the cerulean waters of Baa Atoll. At first I watch in alarm as a gaping mouth emerges from the milky blue, hovering plankton and coming straight for me. But rather than swallow me whole, this great black velvet blanket of a fish passes just below my motionless body, not even grazing a flipper. Then another sail-like creature appears and then another. They swim in formation, performing swooping somersaults one after another, like an expertly choreographed underwater ballet.

But all dreams must end, and our awakening comes in the form of Inthi bearing three bags containing our shoes. Only then do I realise that our week was spent entirely barefoot. *ES Scott Dunn offers seven nights at Soneva Fushi from £1,655 per person, based on two adults and two children sharing a Crusoe villa on a half-board basis, and includes flights and sea plane transfers (020 8682 5020; scottdunn.com)*