

VANITY FAIR

HOLLYWOOD 2017

On Travel

*"I haven't been everywhere,
but it's on my list."
— SUSAN SONTAG*

SOUTH AMERICA

(On Travel talks Latin)

COLOMBIA, BRAZIL, BOLIVIA,
ECUADOR *and* ARGENTINA

By ALICE B-B, ALEX CUADROS, STEVE KING,
PAUL RICHARDSON *and* NICHOLAS SHAKESPEARE

Reef ENCOUNTER

Two heavenly Maldivian newcomers go head to head—but which is best? ALICE B-B adjudicates



Four Seasons Voavah Baa Atoll

FOUR SEASONS VOAVAH BAA ATOLL

Big Picture

Four Seasons' first private island and the world's only exclusive-use UNESCO hideaway in a World Biosphere Reserve.

Design Creds

A five-acre island with three villas that sleep a total of 22 people, designed by Murad Ismail. Expect polished concrete, wood floors, four-poster beds, big open-plan sitting areas to connect with nature, the sea and powdery sand. Plus overwater hammocks.

Devilish Detail

When it comes to private, size matters; the three-bedroom beach villa is 11,593sq ft; while on the Beach House mezzanine is an eight-person rocking chair.

Action Stations

The main hub is a double-storey Beach House with a massive open-plan sitting

room and dining room that looks over the pool to the ocean beyond. Upstairs are two bedroom suites, and an adorable four-bunk children's bedroom.

Best For

Big families, parties, weddings, "I want to be alone" types or just a stonking honeymoon for fancy-pants celebrities. The VIP service whisks you through Malé airport before boarding a private seaplane to land Bond-style at Voavah just 35 minutes later.

Worst For

People-watching. There are none to watch. It's so private you can have a massive party with a socking great sound system and the only complaints will be from the fish.

Blinking Good

The island's own Ocean of Consciousness over-water spa has bespoke Ila treatments including gong baths, reiki and a flower and basil spa bath looking out over the ocean.

Nice One

Voavah has a staff of 25. That's more than one renowned Four Seasons trained staff member per guest.



Sporty

The island has its own Padi dive centre and comes with two boats including a 62ft yacht, the Voavah Summer. The watersports team will take you for private dives, sailing, jetskiing, deep-sea fishing, kite surfing, jet blading, sea-bob, kayaking—whatever you fancy. Best of all: Hanifaru Bay, home to the world's biggest known population of manta rays, is just 30 minutes away.

Grub's Up

Plan dream menus in advance with island chef Ruben Fernandes. Or ask him and his excellent team of eight staff to plan dining spots or surprise you with moonlit feasts or themed parties. And in the not-so-distance is the best pizza in the Indian Ocean at Four Seasons Landaa Giraavaru resort.



Knock It Back

The Voavah Virgin, a non-alcoholic drink made of island-grown basil, honey and soda, blended with a cup of ice. A refreshing mocktail on a hot Maldivian day.

Luxury Equals

A wash and blow-dry... All the bathrooms are fitted with Japanese lavatories.

Last Word

"Yes". Because anything is possible on Voavah.
fourseasons.com



SONEVA JANI NOONU ATOLL

Big Picture

A waterworld fantasy; 26 bleached wood villas, like fairytale castles rising from a vast aqua-blue lagoon.

Design Credo

Husband and wife team Sonu and Eva Shivdasani were the first to bring eco-luxe to the Maldives in 2000 with Soneva Fushi. Now comes this child's fantasy for big-boy wallets: Rapunzel turrets, a retractable roof for night-time stargazing and a slide from the top floor that whizzes you straight into the ridiculously blue water.

Devilish Detail

Shingle-covered roofs that shimmer like fish scales. Secret TVs that rise from a stack of leather trunks at the bottom of the bed, curved walkways, dolphin sculpture hanging lights (sounds naff, looks beautiful) and small driftwood doors by the bed to hide unsightly plug sockets.

Action Stations

It all happens at The Gathering, a vast hub where Soneva fans will find a spa, gym, over-water hammocks, cheese room, sushi room and the chocolate room, which is open 24 hours a day.

Best For

Over-water villa fans. They've come a long way since the first incarnations in Bora Bora in the 1970s, when they didn't even have a balcony.

Worst For

Hydrophobes. Currently, nearly everything happens on water. And for privacy obsessives; despite the villas being generously spread apart, there's no getting round your neighbour swimming or kayaking by.

Blinking Good

Dinner at So Starstruck, where a vast telescope named Ilios rises from a glass floor allowing guests to marvel at the dark side of the moon, Saturn's rings, Mars's orange glow and, if you're lucky, Uranus, all under the tutelage of resident astronomer Mike Dalley.

Nice One

Soneva Jani's eco-credentials are remarkable—pine is from New Zealand and cluciana from South Africa. Water is bottled and furniture made on the island. Movie-goers at outdoor Cinema Paradiso listen with wireless headphones so as not to disturb the birds and bats; and the island has a resident marine biologist to protect the nesting turtles.



A one-bedroom overwater villa at Soneva Jani, Noonu Atoll



Sporty

The vast lagoon is a great place to learn to sail and kite surf. There are stingrays and eagle rays, but keen snorkellers will find much of the coral reef has suffered from bleaching due to the rise in sea temperature. Divers fare better; the temperature is cooler the deeper you go, so head to Shark Point for a shiver.

Grub's Up

Head chef Kengo Tomita is Japanese but trained in Spain. Dishes include tomato tartare with almond hummus and pomegranate or Brecon Beacons beef with truffle. Dining spots range from desert-island picnics to supper at Cinema Paradiso.

Knock It Back

Hang out in the wine room or cycle to the Rum Shack on South Beach. Even the filtered drinking water's a bit special—sip on Vitality, Wellness Mix or Cupid's Kiss crystal-powered water.

Luxury Equals

You won't find acres of marble and gold taps at Soneva Jani. "Being barefoot, riding a bike, seeing stars without light pollution. That is what we're about here," says Sonu Shivdasani.

Last Word

Remote. Noonu is a relatively undeveloped atoll with no inhabited islands visible to the naked eye. But if you get cabin fever, hop on a 15-minute boat trip to Cheval Blanc Randheli for dinner at the remarkably good Le 1947 restaurant, where actual bottles of 1947 Cheval Blanc are waiting to be drunk. soneva.com



RICHARD WATIE (OVERWATER VILLA); MASTER BEDROOM; DANI; AEREFUCIO (ATOLL); © GEBEPIX (WINE); GIBBY (SLIPPERS); SCUBA EQUIPMENT); ISTOCK BY GETTY IMAGES (PLATE); TELESCOPE)