

72+ page Smart Spaces-zine

THE UPSIDE OF DOWNSIZING

# belle

Cafe society  
*the new  
hospitality designers*

NEXT LEVEL  
CREATIVE  
Spaces, places  
and faces

RUG HAUL  
Our favourite  
floor hits

# LUXE COASTING

WATERSIDE WINNERS  
*from PALMY to PORTSEA*

An aerial photograph of a Maldives resort. The image shows several small, lush green islands with white sandy beaches, surrounded by clear turquoise water. The water transitions from light blue near the shore to deeper blue further out. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The text 'Walking on SUNSHINE' is overlaid on the top half of the image.

*Walking on*  
**SUNSHINE**

Stargazing, underwater dining, swimming with manta rays and barefoot fine dining are a just few of the attractions at these Maldives resorts.

Words **SUSAN SKELLY**



## SONEVA FUSHI

They had me at 'dedicated ice-cream room'. But not for Soneva Fushi the flavours of the corner store. In this Maldivian milk bar you'll choose from a menu of up to 30 flavours that include organic coconut charcoal and almond, orange and Campari, and a vegan pineapple and chilli sorbet.

There are surprises aplenty to give a holiday at Soneva Fushi extra *joie de vivre*. The abundant organic food, for a start. Breakfast offers more stations than London's Tube. On request: pearl oyster mushrooms from the mushroom hut, sautéed with onion in garlic oil, served with shots of watermelon and ginger juice. At night, under the Milky Way, there's barefoot fine dining in the treetops or on the beach.

A well-tended rainforest gradually yields its secrets: an observatory; a wine cellar, stocking 7000 bottles; a glass-blowing studio; possibly the best children's club on the planet; a jogging track; and the outdoor Cinema Paradiso, where Australian fashion influencer Margaret Zhang recently screened her first short film, *There's No Space Left in C# Minor*.

An archipelago of 1192 coral islands the Maldives sits in 298sqkm of the Indian Ocean, south-west of Sri Lanka and India. Visitors fly into Male and go by seaplane or speedboat to their island. Soneva Fushi is located on the eastern edge of Baa Atoll, a UNESCO heritage site.

Every guest is assigned a Mr or Ms Friday, a nod to the Man Friday servant in Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*, a copy of which is in all rooms. Our Mr Friday explains the Soneva philosophy of intelligent barefoot luxury. Indeed shoes are taken from you on the speedboat ride over, not to be returned until you leave. The appeal, he says, is of all that you don't get in the city – outdoor showers, sunken jungle baths, a kind of rustic luxury where nothing is perfect.

But cycling to breakfast through dappled sunlight with wood hens flitting across sandy pathways, chameleon crested lizards scuttling up tree trunks in an embrace of birdsong feels pretty close to perfect.

Mostly you get around the island – 1.4km long by 400m wide – on bicycle or on foot. Mr Friday will collect you in a motorised buggy when it's raining, late, too far, or you've had an energy bypass.

The accommodation at Soneva Fushi is effortlessly chic rather than precious. It's full of pitted timber, driftwoods, natural fabrics and parchments, and king-sized beds with soft muslin canopies. There are 18 private villa residences and 61 villas for guests, the smallest the one-bedroom Crusoe villa, a loose-fitting 235sqm. The villas and gardens are spacious. A few dozen friends over for sunset drinks? No problem. There are private pools, thickly cushioned oversized lounges, a hammock, daybeds on the sand, and the sea beyond.

The Soneva philosophy is 'Slow Life', an acronym for sustainable, local, organic, wellness, learning, inspiring, fun, experiences. With the latter in mind come dolphin safaris (bubbles and tuna ceviche in hand) to witness spinner dolphins practising gold-medal synchronised swimming. There are the requisite water sports, a gym and tennis court, and astronomers and marine biologists are on hand to explain the worlds above and below. [soneva.com](http://soneva.com)



This page, from top Soneva Fushi's Villa 41 features a private pool and two ground-floor bedrooms with their own waterfalls, while the master bedroom has its own steam facilities. All beds are king sized with soft muslin canopies. The sensitively situated Crusoe villas. Opposite page The resort is located on the eastern edge of Baa Atoll, a UNESCO biosphere reserve in the Indian Ocean.





This page, clockwise from above: The overwater villas at Soneva Jani feature relaxing tones of grey and putty-coloured wood with accents of lavender. For the ultimate in escapism, a water hammock. Situated on the Medhufaru lagoon, the resort is more overwater than island. The master bedroom in the four-bedroom water villa leads to an outdoor bathroom.



## SONEVA JANI

Soneva Jani – the bouncing baby of the Soneva portfolio – opened in November 2016. Located in the Noonu Atoll, Soneva Jani is 32 nautical miles, or an hour's speedboat ride, north of sister resort Soneva Fushi, or 40 minutes from Male by seaplane. It's more overwater than island, its defining feature the Medhufaru lagoon it sits in – at 5.6km long, it's the largest in the Maldives.

With its turrets and waterslides, Soneva Jani is like a medieval storybook village that's nibbled on magic mushrooms. To wake up here is to have been parachuted into the centre spread of a glossy travel brochure. Endless shimmering blues, and really tough decisions around where to be – the overpool net-bed, the sunken lounge between the pool and the sea, or the swim-out hammock.

There are only 24 overwater villas and one island villa here, but development to catch up with the demand, both on the island and over the lagoon, is underway. Also under investigation (in a country where point of difference is everything) is an anti-gravity aquarium.

Soneva Jani's three-storey communal hub, The Gathering, is all whitewashed wood and light and space, with elegant library nooks. But if The Gathering looks kind of empty, it's because no one's leaving home.

Because, really – while there are starry dinners with introductions to the Andromeda galaxy courtesy of a telescope on steroids, sailing and snorkelling, and an overwater screening of *Goldfinger* after a Japanese dinner with a fine Martinborough pinot noir to talk to the wasabi sorbet – it's all about the dazzling fairytale villas.

Overwater villas – arranged like legs on a wriggly centipede – start at 411sqm. The interiors are dove grey and putty-coloured wood with accents of purple and lavender. If there's a style descriptor it would be 'boatshed chic'.

There's a little home office with wi-fi if you just can't help yourself. Feed the addiction, then program the sound system to whatever decade rocks your boat, raid the wine fridge, eat the free chocolates, find a sunken lounge and watch the underworld at play. You deserve this.

Ignore it for a while, because you're too old for that, but then relent: the resort's signature water slide – entered from your glam rooftop retreat – is guaranteed to bring out the squealing inner child.

After dark, the retractable roof above the bed, with the stars beyond, is the time for grown-ups. [soneva.com](http://soneva.com)

