

Beautiful little



Close your eyes and think of your happy place... chances are, it resembles the lush paradise of Naladhu Private Island in the Maldives

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Sun, sea, sand, and a kaleidoscope of coral reef life... The Maldives' postcard-perfect scenery is famously unparalleled. There are more than 1 000 islets strewn like pearls over 145 000sq km of ocean. Two hundred of these tiny islands are inhabited, many with the same luxurious resort options, azure waters, and superb diving opportunities. So how do you choose the perfect resort for you? The winner of the 2017 Condé Nast Traveler's Readers' Choice Award (voted for by 300 000 people) – and choice of discreet Middle Eastern royals – is a great start.

Perched on the edge of a lagoon shared with sister islands Anantara Dhigu and Veli, Naladhu Private Island, in the South Malé Atoll, may look like any other five-star resort – but on closer inspection it's revealed as the ideal castaway spot. While only a 35-minute speedboat ride from the airport, Naladhu – which means "beautiful little island" – is remote enough to feel as if you've escaped to the other side of the world, which just happens to be a perfect slice of paradise.

The sound of beating drums signals your arrival, with staff waiting to greet you at the jetty. Ensure you're looking your stylish best because they take a photo of you the moment you disembark – "so you can see how different you look at the end of the trip."

With a super rapid check-in done at the airport – while waiting for your boat – on arrival to the island you are led directly to your room, with rose petals strewn before you as if you are royalty walking to your palace.

Naladhu is a natural yet majestic haven with only 19 colonial-style beach houses and one lavish two-bedroom residence dotted around the island's perimeter, with sandy pathways weaving through lush vegetation that parts to reveal magnificent ocean surroundings. Even if the resort is at full capacity, the design is such that you'll feel as if you're the only people on the island – aside from the staff who cater to your every need, sometimes before you've even realized what it is you want. All rooms come with a house master who is available on-call 24/7.

At the beach houses, latticed doors open onto teak floors overlaid with plush locally made carpets, while whitewashed walls rise to gabled roofs, letting in natural light. Antique furnishings complement the colonial theme. The 300sqm space includes a king-sized bed which overlooks a private verandah with an oversized swing daybed. The real wow factor, however, is the open-air bathroom, which features a sunken terrazzo tub that flows into your own private glass-tiled swimming pool. There's also a steam room and back garden with waterfall shower.

Each house contains the usual espresso machine and gourmet minibar expected in a five-star establishment. Where it excels is the extra amenities: the iPod packed with relaxing, mood-setting playlists; the iPad with international newspapers and information on the island's restaurants and many activities; the Bose surround-sound system; the speedy Wi-Fi. There's even an island mobile phone that connects you to your house master.

BELOW ENJOY THE LUXURY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL BEACH RESIDENCE DECK AND POOL. BOTTOM LEFT EACH BEACH HOUSE HAS ITS OWN POOL. BOTTOM RIGHT INDOOR/OUTDOOR LIVING IN THE OCEAN POOL VILLA.



While the serene ambience on the island should help you sleep peacefully, there's also a pillow menu and scented candles to help personalize your island home and ensure supreme comfort. For extra relaxation, book an in-room massage, with the therapist knocking out your knots on the verandah. Other thoughtful extras include an adaptor kit for various international plugs; an overnight kit with shaving foam, razor, and a toothbrush; a mosquito survival kit with repellants and burners; and a fitness kit with a yoga mat and resistance bands. Each house even has its own kayak for two people. It's this attention to detail that makes Naladhu stand apart from its contemporaries.

If you need a break from soaking up the sun's rays on your own private stretch of beach, sign up for a spot of fishing, dolphin watching, a *dhoni* cruise, swimming with turtles, or snorkeling with whale sharks. You can also try your hand at making Thai and Maldivian cuisine with onsite cooking classes. And if you want to explore a bit farther, you can: guests at Naladhu can access the two sister islands, Anantara Dhigu and Veli – visitors there can't do the same. This means you have a choice of 12 dining experiences. On Naladhu, The Living Room's modern international cuisine makes for a terrific breakfast or romantic candlelit dinner to the sound of crashing waves. For a tête-à-

tête experience, al fresco dining on the wooden deck as part of the Intimate Dining affairs will be a memorable meal. Veli and Dhigu have a larger selection of restaurants, offering Thai cuisine at the highly recommended Baan Huraa as well as Japanese sushi and teppanyaki at Origami, Maldivian favorites, and fresh seafood. If you'd like to explore the luxuries of the Indian Ocean, the beautiful little island of Naladhu is an idyllic place to stay. □ From AED 2 890 per night. Anantara.com/en/naladhu-maldives



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PARADISE