

Clinging desperately to the decking of our Ocean Villa as waves crash against them, it seems the local crabs really don't want to leave Naladhu Private Island. We can relate. When our boat eventually departs, it is like a little piece of us has been chiseled away.

The Maldives is probably the most chronicled travel destination in the world but when five-star service and idyllic vistas are basically guaranteed, resorts must work hard to stand out.

Sustainability, that buzziest of travel buzzwords, is an increasingly attractive quality and in the Maldives it has certainly crept into the collective consciousness. It helps, then, that Anantara-owned resort Naladhu and its sister islands Veli and Dhigu, have long been dedicated to conservation.

This came to the fore in 2016 when a mass bleaching of coral left many of the Maldives' spectacular reefs looking dull and anaemic. Staff at Naladhu wistfully recall the colourful underwater landscape, and say they were reduced to tears when they first saw the results of the bleaching.

It is both understandable, and admirable, then, that Anantara's involvement in the HARP (Holistic Approach to Reef Protection) initiative has directly engaged guests in regeneration, encouraging visitors to plant new coral in protected areas and donate towards marine biology programmes.

Fortunately, Naladhu is still teeming with wildlife. Stingrays glide through the crystal lagoon waters, hermit crabs scuttle across the beach in misshapen shells, and bats swoop from palm at twilight. It is a nirvana for naturalists.

While rich bio-diversity is a major draw, Naladhu's luxurious setting definitely aids the appreciation. The sprawling 300 sq m Ocean Villas, each named after indigenous plants, sit on the island's perimeter and face out to the Indian Ocean, ensuring maximum privacy. ▶



PRIVATE

PROPERTY

Stay at the eco-aware Naladhu Private Island
and your mind will be as clear as the water

BY MARK LOMAS



Vivid vistas, endearing people and total serenity make leaving Naladhu Private Island a real wrench

Pool houses, palm trees, hammocks and sunset snacks – life can become hectic at Naladhu Private Island

▶ A glass-tiled swimming pool offers an appealing alternative to the lagoon, while an outdoor terrace tub provides a memorable bath, looking out to sea under an impossibly starry sky. Naladhu is a sanctuary for sitting – whether on a swinging daybed, at a dinner table in the coconut groves or in a beachside cabana.

Dining barefoot on the beach with the heavens twinkling above, is an experience one can never tire of. The quality of the food matches the setting at The Living Room restaurant, with seafood unsurprisingly the star – from freshly caught lobster to Maldivian yellow fin tuna tartare. It is the island's only eatery, and serves an outstanding breakfast that can be taken any time of day. The excellent Thai restaurant Baan Huraa, meanwhile, is only a short walk away, set out to sea between Naladhu and neighbouring Veli.

Easily accessible by boat, the other islands also have delightful restaurants, a spa and watersports. Scuba diving is an essential experience; the visibility is unmatched almost anywhere in the world and despite the bleaching of 2016, marine life is still in good health.

Be warned: leaving Naladhu is a real wrench. Expectations are always high when visiting the Maldives but Anantara exceeds them at every turn. Vivid vistas, endearing people and total serenity – Naladhu is a place that captures the imagination and, like those determined Maldivian crabs, refuses to let go. ■ anantara.com

