

# DIVE RIGHT IN!

**MAKE YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION COME TRUE THIS YEAR BY VISITING THE MALDIVES**



**Above:** Relax by the pool at Anantara Veli, where we checked into a gorgeous over-water villa (bottom left). **Right:** The Beckhams are Maldives fans

It's no wonder the Maldives always tops holiday wish lists. The stunning archipelago offers dreamy islands resorts with sandy beaches, fiery sunsets and coral reef-ringed atolls that are dotted across the Indian Ocean like exquisite pearls. Always a favourite with honeymooners and celebrities such as David and Victoria Beckham, who are regular visitors, OK!'s Jeanne Terblanche headed out to soak up a little slice of heaven...

## ARRIVING IN PARADISE

The magic started long before we landed as we were able to see some of the beautiful coral islands on our final descent to Malé airport, located on the country's capital island. As we exited the airport, we were met by a line of sea taxis, speedboats and sea planes waiting to transfer holidaymakers to their tropical retreats. OK! boarded the private speedboat that would take us on a stunning scenic 35-minute ride to Anantara Veli, a couples-only villa resort.

Walking along the wooden jetty to our thatched-roofed over-water villa, we found it hard to pick our jaw off the ground as we spotted

a turtle and stingray in the crystal-clear waters. Opening the beautifully-carved doors to our villa, we saw that our bed overlooked a wooden deck with a plunge pool and the most turquoise sea we'd ever seen.

We couldn't resist a quick dip before heading off for lunch at the Dhoni Bar, followed by a relaxing post-flight massage in the spa set in lush tropical gardens. Dinner was teppanyaki-style Japanese at Origami, where the chef showed off his culinary skills as he prepared a delicious dish of grilled tiger prawns and fried rice in front of us.



## RELAX AND UNWIND

After breakfast at the beach-side Fushi Cafe and a spot of swimming in the ocean, it was time for our spa treatment that took place in an over-water suite. From our massage bed we could watch colourful fish flit around below through a window in the floor.

Another day, another island, and this time it was the

turn of the tiny private Ghulifushi that you can reach by kayak or boat. After enjoying a buffet lunch, OK! tried our hand at surfing. Initially quite nervous, Tropicsurf's helpful staff put us at ease straightaway and made learning lots of fun. This helped us work up a good appetite



## NEW SKILLS

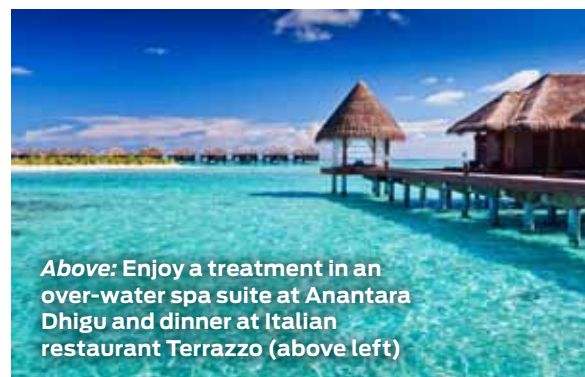
After a leisurely breakfast, chef Mo showed us how to make some delicious crab cakes and tuna curry at the Spice Spoons cookery school, which we got to eat at the end of our lesson. After a quick siesta in the sun, next up was a beginner's diving session in the hotel's sheltered lagoon with a diving instructor from Aquafanatics, a watersports company based on the island. After our refresher course, Paula took us out to the house reef where we swam among hundreds

of colourful tropical fish. Dinner was at Baan Huraa, a stunning over-water island restaurant with a glass floor so that guests can watch the sea life as they tuck into tasty Thai cuisine.

## ADVENTURE AWAITS

Just a five-minute boat ride away and OK! reached Anantara's neighbouring property Dhigu, a family-friendly luxury resort offering a kids' club, treasure hunts, coconut painting and a wooden pirate ship. As we walked along a winding tree-lined path, OK! spied fruit bats flying from tree to tree and an oriental garden lizard scurrying along the hot sand. Nature is everywhere. After checking out our beach villa, which featured the most amazing open-air bathroom, we grab our fins and mask to go snorkelling on the house reef. We couldn't believe our luck when a pod of dolphins shows up, playfully jumping and spinning out of the water, and the icing on the cake, was when we spotted a few turtles too.

We thought this would be pretty hard to beat, but the champagne sunset cruise on a luxury yacht that followed and dinner on Anantara's Naladhu private island came very close. On arrival at the ultra-exclusive 20-villa resort, we dined on grilled tuna and succulent steak at a candlelit table surrounded by flickering bamboo torches. Afterwards we gently swayed in one of the hammocks hooked up between the palm trees and enjoyed a spot of stargazing.



**Above:** Enjoy a treatment in an over-water spa suite at Anantara Dhigu and dinner at Italian restaurant Terrazzo (above left)



OK! couldn't wait to check into the island paradise in the middle of the Indian Ocean

for dinner that night at Terrazzo, the Italian restaurant, followed by a movie under the stars.

### A FOND FAREWELL

On our final day in paradise we couldn't resist one last snorkelling trip. As we headed back to the villa to pack, we were surprised to find a beautiful aeroplane made of palm leaves spread out on the bed and came to the quick conclusion that the Anantara's special charm is not just about providing barefoot luxury but also employing

the most wonderful staff. As we board the speedboat that whisks us back to the airport, several of the staff



line up on the jetty to wave us off and we dream of a return visit.

### HOW DO I GET THERE?

Premier Holidays ([www.premierholidays.co.uk](http://www.premierholidays.co.uk); 08444 937 531) offer a seven-night half-board package, including flights, staying in an over-water bungalow at the Anantara Veli Maldives Resort from £3,945. Price based on two adults travelling between April 9 and July 12. Premier also offers a seven-night half-board package, including flights, for two adults and two children staying at the Anantara Dhigu Maldives Resort from £6,949. Valid for travel before March 22.

**OK!**

FOR MORE ON ANANTARA'S FOUR RESORTS IN THE MALDIVES, VISIT [WWW.ANANTARA.COM/MALDIVES](http://WWW.ANANTARA.COM/MALDIVES).

REPORT BY JEANNE TERBLANCHE  
EDITED BY ANNABEL MACKIE, OK! TRAVEL EDITOR  
FIVE OF THE BEST AND TRAVELLER'S TALES BY  
NANCY BROWN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY,  
GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK

## TRAVELLER'S TALES

### DEBRA STEPHENSON

THE ACTRESS ON A NEAR MISS AND THREE YEARS OF HONEYMOONS

#### What's been your most romantic holiday?

My husband James [Duffield] and I were married for three years before we started a family, so we had regular mini honeymoons together. We went to Mauritius and spent three weeks there relaxing, which was really nice. We followed that up with a trip to Australia, New Zealand and the Cook Islands.

#### Where's the most idyllic place you've been for work?

I'm lucky enough to have been to a few lovely locations. For *Bad Girls* we went to Marbella when [her character] Shell escaped, which was extremely glamorous – certainly more glamorous than the old prison we filmed in!

#### Have you ever had a holiday disaster?

When we were in the Cook Islands we almost missed our flight back – there was only one flight a week and I'd somehow got the dates muddled. We thought we were going the next day and the hotel called us saying our taxi was there. It was quite the Benny Hill moment getting all our stuff ready in time!

#### Where's your favourite place to holiday in the UK?

Edinburgh. My husband and I got together in the city so it's our special place.

#### Who's your perfect holiday partner in crime?

I can't imagine going on holiday without my husband and children [Max, 15, and Zoe, ten]. A family holiday is the ideal thing for me – I'm making the most of it before the kids the grow up!



DEBRA STARS IN 'SON OF A PREACHER MAN', WHICH IS TOURING THE UK UNTIL JULY.

## 5 OF THE BEST TRAVEL ESSENTIALS



**1 MOSHI AVANTI ON-EAR HEADPHONES, £225**, [www.moshi.com](http://www.moshi.com). Lightweight and noise-isolating, these headphones make listening to music on the plane a breeze.

**2 BLACK EYEWEAR COOTIE SUNGLASSES, £197**, [www.blackeyewear.com](http://www.blackeyewear.com). The pink will make the boys wink, while protecting your peepers from the sun.

**3 B LONDON ANANAS WASHBAG, £20**, [www.blondonboutique.com](http://www.blondonboutique.com). This pretty velvet washbag will keep your toiletries cosy and leave you feeling totally tropical.

**4 TRIPP LITE 4W ROSE GOLD CABIN CASE, £65**, [www.debenhams.com](http://www.debenhams.com). Lightweight and robust, it's the perfect carry-on.

**5 LOVER OF LUXE PASSPORT HOLDER, £29**, [www.loverofluxe.com](http://www.loverofluxe.com). Personalise this pretty passport holder with your initials.