



**COCO PALM**

dhuni kolhu · maldives

press clipping



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# Where beauty rules the waves

**Sarah Lester** finds paradise on earth in the Maldives – but could it soon be lost?

**W**ITHIN a few generations it's more than likely that the Maldives won't exist. These islands are on the fron-

tlime of global warming with rising sea levels threatening to submerge them forever.

Earlier this year the Maldives' new President Mohamed Nasheed revealed plans to use money from tourism to buy

land in India, Sri Lanka and Australia saying: "We do not want to leave the Maldives, but we also do not want to be climate refugees living in tents for decades."

His heartbreaking intention

makes the fragile beauty of the Maldives all the more precious.

Paradise islands are written about a lot – you read cliches of white sand, swaying palm trees and crystal blue waters

The Maldives is the reality that gave us the cliches.

It's made up of 1,192 islands, surrounded by pure coral reefs and soothing lagoons, sprinkled across turquoise sea. Just a few hundred are lived on, of which many are exclusive hotel resorts.

A 30-minute seaplane ride from Male, the nation's capital, takes you to Coco Palm Dhuni Kohlu. There's something about a seaplane; the child in me finds the whole idea of a plane that takes off and lands on the water

thrilling – like being in a James Bond movie. The journey itself gives a real perspective on the sheer number and beauty of the islands. It's a photograph from National Geographic but there in front of your eyes – white sandy, palm-fringed islands ringed by the bluest of blue.

Coco Palm sits in the Baa Atoll. It's a small island and takes about half an hour to walk round. Yet it never feels busy.

There are 98 villas either on the beach, surrounded by lush vegetation, or on stilts over the sea with manta rays and a rainbow of tropical fish passing beneath.

It's an amazing place, an immaculate island village utterly dedicated to luxury. Holiday-makers wend their way barefoot along tracks through trees or along the beach with a Stepford-esque smile of contentment. They stroll out of their villa onto soft down-like sand or plunge into crystal water which is never more than a few feet away.

No one looks sad and no one moves quickly. It's as though there's a law against noise, rage and misery.

I spent hours snorkelling with (reassuringly harmless) sharks, tickled by iridescent fish

– and even saw a turtle.

Attention to detail appears paramount, rose petals sprinkled on the bed each night and towels fashioned origami-like

into swans. The resort runs a 'Uniquely Coco' programme which, in a (coco)nutshell, aims to make dreams come true...

A five-course dinner for two under the stars with a private chef? No problem.

Picnic on a desert island? Of course.

Watch the sunset from a traditional dhoni boat? No problem.

Champagne breakfast at sunrise? Easy

Stroll barefoot along the beach to an outdoor private cinema while supping champagne? That would be our pleasure. You get the picture.

Overnight on a nearby desert island was the little escapade we chose. As the sun set we were whisked by boat to an unoccupied island.

Wine was poured while our personal chef prepared dinner, a five-course fresh fish barbecue served at the water's edge as the last light of the sun bobbed under the horizon.

After an overnight stay in a luxurious beach hut our butler delivered breakfast. The sand was alive with tiny white crabs, dolphins peeped out of the water and flying fish soared through the air like silver pearls. This was the millionaire lifestyle, not a normal day for a Manchester journalist.

Philippe Frugere is the avuncular manager of the Coco Palm. He has recently taken over after years looking after resorts in Mauritius.

He likens his job to being in charge of a small country 'managing seaplanes, boats, guests, staff and, of course, nature'. By nature he means looking after

the environment, including the movement of sandbags to cope with erosion. For six months of the year

they are piled on one side of the island to protect the sand and then they are shifted to the other as the tides change. It is an ominous sign of the fight for survival the Maldives face.

There is a very real sense of the battle against global warming here. Coco Palm has joined many of the other resorts to look at ways to preserve islands for as long as possible.

While the irony of the need for gas-guzzling planes to bring in tourists is not lost, conservation and being green is at the

heart of a lot of what they try and do. The Maldivian people need the tourist industry for survival but the tourists need to be green to help the Maldives survive.

Water comes from desalination plants, fishing is sustainable, work is done to preserve the precious reefs and tourists are asked to take plastics and bottles home as there is little space for recycling on the Maldives.

The most populated island is Male, the thumping, pulsating capital. With a few hours to kill before the flight home, I took a 10-minute boat trip across the bay to the city.

After a week of sand and sea, it was incongruous to see a desert island dense with buildings. In fact it was strange to see buildings with more than two floors. It was eight o'clock at night but the harbour was bus-

tling with barges piled high with goods heading out to the islands. Bananas, flowers, sugar, fridges, even a precariously perched flat screen TV – the only way to move anything is by water. And then there were fish, everywhere fish. The air was peppered with the slapping sound of fin on wood as they were chucked on to the boats. In sweltering temperatures the

sailors stood under makeshift showers hosing themselves down to keep cool.

It is sad to think that this hive of activity and the sheer wonder of this beautiful country could disappear.

The Maldivan president has pledged to make his islands carbon neutral within a decade, moving to solar and wind power. But it may be too late to turn the tide against the inevitable and paradise would be well and truly lost.

**'It's an amazing place, an immaculate island village utterly dedicated to luxury'**

### **FACTFILE**

Seven nights at **Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu** starts from £915 per person.

Price is based on Beach Villa on breakfast basis with flights on Qatar Airways departing from Manchester Airport and Sea Plane transfers included.

Offer subject to availability.

Terms and conditions apply.  
To book call 0208 774 7299 and quote **MANCHESTER NEWS**.

For more information on Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu visit [cocopalm.com/dhunikolhu/](http://cocopalm.com/dhunikolhu/)