

THE SUNDAY TIMES

travel

magazine

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Plus

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Maldives

Why let the honeymooners hog paradise? We know the 24 best resorts for everyone

Japan

Take the path less travelled to its ancient heartland



Anantara Dhigu

Who'll love it: Pick 'n' mixers. You're paying a bargain basic rate here, but you can upgrade almost every element — or not — as you wish.

Why? Dhigu is linked to its two sister hotels, Veli and Naladhu, by a two-minute shuttle boat. Naladhu is the poshest, followed by Veli, then Dhigu, but guests aren't restricted to their own island, so can mix and match their meals, pool scenes, bars and beaches (sometimes at an extra cost). Meanwhile, the 'bog standard' Dhigu experience is more than satisfactory: a mere 35-minute speedboat from the airport, it's well spaced out, with villas that are lighter, larger and airier than many pricier Maldivian places.

What else? The main pool — sunset-facing, and flecked with little fibre-optic lights like underwater stars — is a real memory-maker, and the restaurants and bars around it are good enough to attract the nobs over from Naladhu.

Who won't love it: Those who want to forget about money for a fortnight. The other side of being able to upgrade everything is that you need to keep an eye on your spending.

Traveler's tip: Don't be 'upsold' to Veli. If you're travelling as a couple, you might be told it's more appropriate for you, as children are banned there. But Dhigu never gets too kid-crowded, and the beaches and overwater villas are better on (cheaper) Dhigu anyway.

EE Western & Oriental (020 3588 6130, westernoriental.com) has a week from £2,095pp, half board; dhigu-maldives.anantara.com.



Niyama Private Islands

Who'll love it: Smart middle-youthers who want value for money even when they're dropping four grand a week — the good looks on display here are more Boden than bling.

Why? A thoughtful arrangement sees the resort split across two islands: Chill, for those seeking spas and serenity; and Play, for those who want more action (if only for their kids). That means way more is on offer than you'd expect at this price — from local island and mosque tours to kite-surfing and water-powered jetpacks — and you don't have to break out the bitcoins to enjoy it all: there are lots of ways to enjoy it free or cheap (a cute little deli, for instance, combined with the resort's cool complimentary beach bags and many potential picnic spots means brilliant bargain lunches).

What else? Standout features include a surf school, a brilliant kids' club, a cool modern aesthetic for guest rooms, and an underwater restaurant where widescreen windows give jaw-flooding close-ups of the Blue Planet cast.

Who won't love it: Gastronomes will find the food a bit ordinary: more attention has gone into the theatre of it (restaurants in trees, restaurants only reachable by boat, that sub-aqua one...).

Traveler's tip: Don't bother with the overwater villas here. There's not much snorkelling off them, the views from that side of the island are less appealing — and they're pricier.

EE Abercrombie & Kent (01242 547701, abercrombiekent.co.uk) has a week from £4,165pp, half board; niyama.com. ■



Kandolhu

Who'll love it: Honeymooners who really don't need endless disturbance from noisy younger guests.

Why? This is your classic castaway island: nothing more than a bouquet of palm trees, wrapped up with a wide ribbon of ridiculously white sand. You can walk around the entire island in 10 minutes. There are just 30 suites, all whitewashed walls, mid-century cream leather furniture, bleached woods and lovely touches such as GoPro HERO5 cameras and iPads. The Ocean Pool Villas have impressive glass-box bathrooms. Open the full-length sliding window for a sunset soak in your 'dinosaur-half-egg' shaped bath — these come with almost

guaranteed sightings of the resident turtle. There are complimentary stand-up paddleboards, glass-bottomed kayaks and the chance of windsurfing — but you've got nothing motorised to spoil the sense of serenity. And no kids' club either — under-6s are not allowed.

What else? In the absence of tennis courts and yoga classes, the focus is firmly on food, with five restaurant options (unusual for such a small resort), so go full-board to get your money's worth. The laid-back all-day Market is beachfront and perfect for a lazy breakfast. Above it, the deck of Olive serves pasta and side orders of ocean panoramas, and there's the drama of *teppanyaki* at *alfresco Banzai*. Even at full occupancy, you rarely see

another couple outside mealtimes so the place feels like your personal playground. Canadian Marc and Brit Laura have been running the resort since it opened in 2014 and really deliver personalised service.

Who won't love it: Spa lovers. The fitness centre is small and the limited treatment menu features the Irish seaweed range *Voya*, an odd choice for the Indian Ocean.

Traveler's tip: Avoid the beach villas on the eastern tip if you want maximum bronzing — the sun goes by about 3.30pm and there's no main pool.

EE Kuoni (01306 747008, kuoni.co.uk) has a week from £2,999pp, full board, with transfers; kandolhu.com.

TotalGuide

Maldives

Newlyweds, newborns, even Nana — read on for paradise islands to suit everybody

Page 62 Going solo in a sea of soppy couples — one single traveller's story

Page 70 Heaven or hell? What's it really like to visit the Maldives with kids?

Page 76 How to holiday with your lover, long after the honeymoon's over



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PATCH OF
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56