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Soneva Fushi Water Retreats

MALDIVES

The new additions to Soneva's flagship resort plunge guests in barefoot yet sustainable luxury.

Words: Chris Dwyer • Photography: © Sandro Bruecklmeier

It's called a Water Retreat for good reason. The world's largest two-bedroom overwater villa, perched above the turquoise hues of the Indian Ocean, lets guests retreat somewhere very special indeed and is a game-changing addition to Soneva Fushi in The Maldives.

Having opened in 1995, the resort is widely regarded as the first luxury accommodation in the archipelago, so the development of eight new villas marks just the latest step in the brand's journey, as co-founder and CEO Sonu Shivdasani tells *Sleeper*: "These villas are 25 years in the making. We always thought Soneva Fushi would be the jungle and beach, not overwater, but there are only eight low-density water retreats, all totally private."

A beguiling combination of privacy and barefoot sustainable luxury would make them a draw at any time, but in the current climate, their lure is greater still thanks to Soneva's substantial investment in a Covid testing machine. All guests and staff are tested on arrival, before enjoying the whole resort mask-free once a negative result is confirmed.

As quarantine destinations go, it's difficult to imagine anywhere more idyllic, and with sustainability at the heart of everything Soneva do, the low impact design maintains the natural beauty of the setting too. The exact

location of the villas followed a comprehensive environmental assessment to ensure the Baa Atoll's ecosystems remained unharmed, and like the group's other carbon neutral properties, construction materials were sourced sustainably and upcycled styrofoam used as wall insulation.

The Water Retreats sit on a curving jetty – far enough apart for complete seclusion – and offer either sunrise or sunset views. At 585m², the one-bedroom villa is spacious, while the two-bed spans an impressive 857m². Despite the scale, they don't feel impersonal thanks to a connection with the seascape achieved through all-natural materials and gentle colouring of soft blues, greens and beiges.

Soneva's in-house design team, led by co-founder and Creative Director Eva Malmström Shivdasani, was in charge of establishing this connection to the locale. All of the furniture pieces, many of which feature maritime motifs, were crafted on the island from trees or driftwood for example, while any aluminium used in the construction came from melted down soda cans washed-up on the shore.

The ground-floor sala, a living and dining area, sits in the middle of the property, with a master bedroom and inside-outside bathroom on one side, and a smaller bedroom and bathroom on the other. A pantry, dressing rooms



and children's room complete the picture, while upstairs is a deck with another sala and more fabulous views out across the Indian Ocean.

All the tech highlights one would expect are subtly integrated in the master bedroom, but guests will have to make do with Apple TV and Netflix, as happily there are no TV channels. As the Soneva brand mantra goes, 'no shoes, no news' – although you can add 'no masks' to that now. A Bose sound system bolsters the entertainment factor, but it's the retractable roof above the bed that will likely be the most popular feature. Press a button and the sun or stars above are quietly revealed. There's even a weather sensor, so if a single drop of rain falls, the roof automatically closes.

True to its name, the Water Retreats come with plenty of access to the ocean. Along with the private swimming pool, the deck is more than large enough to spread out, while sun loungers, daybeds, a sunken dining area and catamaran nets above the waves are just some of the settings from which to lay back and soak it

all in. Entering the perfectly azure Indian Ocean is no hardship either thanks to multiple steps, a dedicated snorkelling deck, but most of all, a ridiculously-fun 19m water slide that spirals from the villa's top floor into the sea below. Just don't forget to check the tide level first!

Thoughtful touches abound. Two planks have been removed from the outer wall for a perfect view of the ocean from the outdoor bathtub. The occasional glass floor panel allows guests to watch the sealife swim beneath their feet and are another reminder of the location. A Smeg fridge comes stocked with drinking water, desalinated locally and served in bottles crafted in Soneva's very own glass workshop. Bamboo bikes for exploring come with personalised wooden name plates featuring engraved initials. And, ideal for pandemic times, the desk in the study faces the wall to create a picturesque – and for once not virtual – backdrop for Zoom calls, meaning those in attendance can look on with envy as they admire the ocean beyond. What's not to love?



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT
 Owner / Operator: Soneva
 Investor: KSL
 Interior Design:
 Eva Malmstrom Shivdasani
 Lighting Design: PLH Italia
www.soneva.com