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Trip Ideas

Island Vacations

I Stayed at 10 Resorts in the Maldives — Here's What I Found in Paradise

5 weeks, 10 resorts, one incredible trip.

BY KATIE LOCKHART | MAY 29, 2021



CREDIT: COURTESY OF HILTON

"You can take off your mask, miss. No need to wear one on the island," my personal butler said as I stepped onto the dock at [Naladhu Private Island](#). It was the first of ten Maldives resorts I'd be visiting on my first trip since the pandemic began.

The Maldives has done well containing the virus, allowing them to safely open for tourists in July 2020 with a negative PCR test 96 hours prior and a [Traveler Health Declaration Form](#). It helps that each island resort is already designed for outdoor dining and social distancing and that all staff are required to wear masks.

Connected via boardwalks or a quick pontoon ride, Naladhu, [Anantara Veli Maldives Resort](#) and [Anantara Dhigu Maldives Resort](#) share one startlingly blue natural lagoon. They also don't allow inter-island transfers from other resorts due to COVID, so it had to be my first stop off the plane. Luckily, guests can hop from a beach bungalow at Naladhu to an overwater villa at Veli (without a PCR test) within minutes. So, that's exactly what I did.



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Snorkeling with parrotfish around the lagoon, sinking my toes into the soft sand and swimming in my private infinity pool was the perfect daily routine to dip my feet back into travel. Plus, I never got within ten feet of another guest.

After a negative PCR test (the first of nine throughout my trip), a quick speedboat ride took me to the waving staff at the new [Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi](#). The sprawling resort means bicycles are the perfect mode of transport from the super spacious villas to one of its 11 restaurants.



CREDIT: COURTESY OF KATIE LOCKHART

It was here that my mother joined me with a giant reunion hug a year in the making. As the ocean waves lapped along the shore, we did afternoon meditation, sampled the best Peking duck of our lives at Chinese restaurant [Li Long](#), and swam with a pod of wild dolphins.

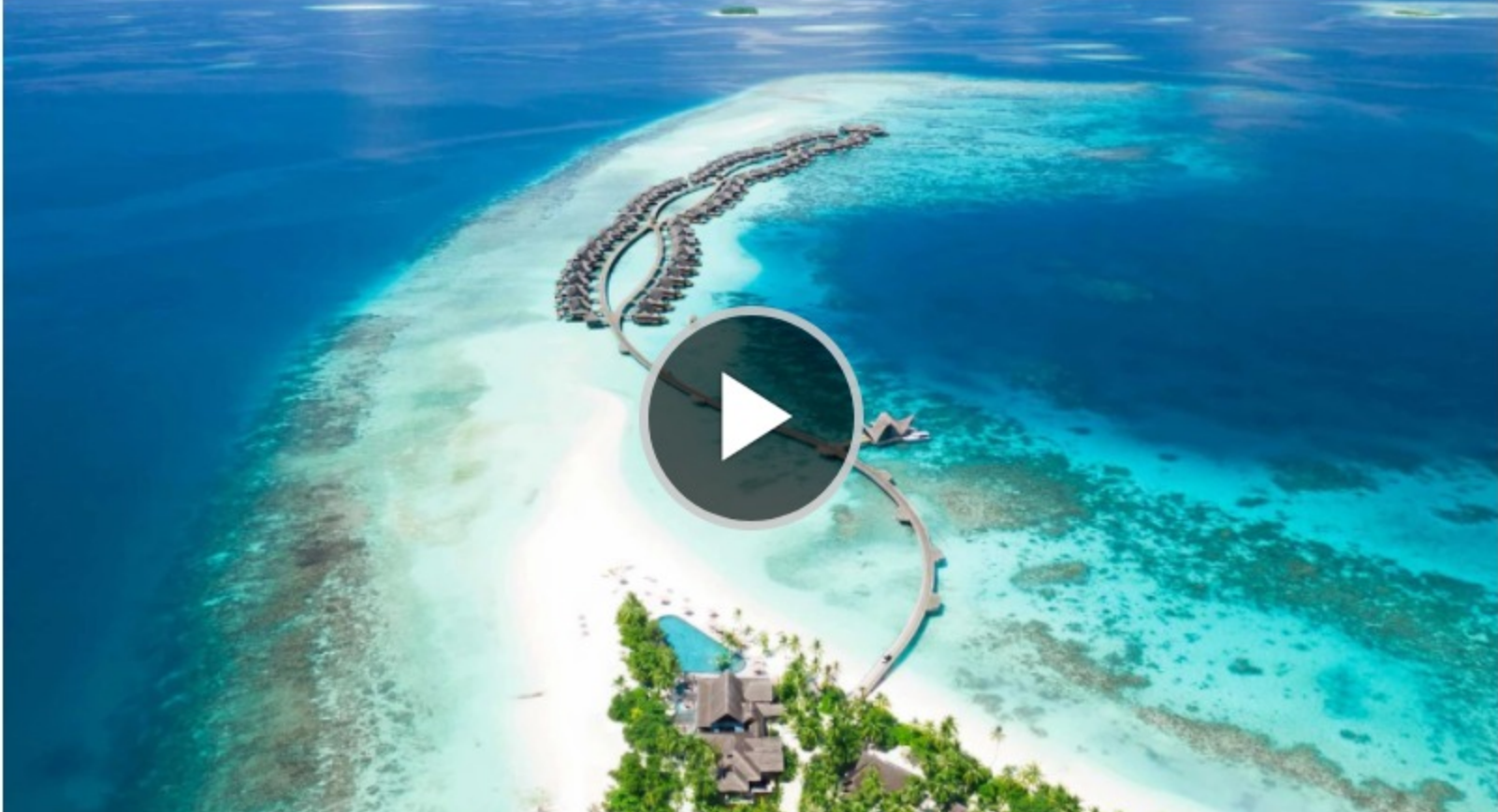


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After a few days, it was time to leave for the [JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa](#). A 45-minute yacht ride from the Waldorf Astoria back to Malé, then a 45-minute Trans Maldivian seaplane ride to the remote island.

Uniform two-story villas painted in pastels resembling inverted Maldivian Dhoni boats line the boardwalk at this new Marriott property. Here, we split our time between dips in our private villa pool and cooling off at the beach near the treehouse Thai restaurant and bar, [Kaashi](#) and [Rum Baan](#). Soaking up the hot sun and a few good books, we looked up every few minutes to pinch ourselves.

With welts on our arms, we took an early morning seaplane back to Malé to head to [JOALI Maldives](#), one of the islands' dreamiest resorts. Its private seaplane ride is luxe, with eight plush swivel seats (instead of the standard 16), cold towels, and glass-bottled water. This super chic, design-centric hotel has feminine touches with its emerald green marble, rose gold fixtures, and unrivaled attention to detail.



JOALI's genuinely friendly, attentive service, even from a team running with less staff due to COVID, made it my mom's favorite resort of the trip. The COVID rapid-test at the beginning of our stay also gave us the added peace of mind to use their new, expansive gym and enjoy the marble hammam, one of the just three in the Maldives.

The following week, my mom and I split our time between [Soneva Fushi](#) and [Soneva Jani](#). Soneva has set the world's standard for COVID protocol, requiring all guests to take a PCR test on arrival. We had to wait in our room for about 12-hours before we could enjoy the resort, but when your villa is basically a mansion, and you can swim in your private pool or beachfront area, it's not a problem.



CREDIT: COURTESY OF KATIE LOCKHART

Once we tested negative, we could enjoy the multi-room breakfast buffet, ride electric bikes around the island, and roam [Soneva Jani Chapter Two](#), the resort's latest offering. Its 27 new villas are similar to Chapter One, but guests here are on a completely all-inclusive package, feasting on a raw, plant-based menu at its new restaurant, [So Wild](#), or spending the entire day at the new Ayurvedic center.

Soneva was the last resort for my mom, who was heading home to Boston. My dad had arranged to visit the remaining resorts with me, but because his negative PCR test didn't have the address of the laboratory where it was taken, he was denied boarding by Qatar Airlines. A part of pandemic travel, but nonetheless devastating, I decided to try to enjoy these resorts solo.

One of the best resorts for solo travelers to the Maldives, and my personal favorite, is [Gili Lankanfushi Maldives](#). A 20-minute speedboat ride from Malé lands you in this rustic, all-overwater villa resort. There was plenty to do, from finishing "Where The Crawdads Sing" (a recommendation from the Barefoot Bookseller at Soneva Fushi) to movie night in the jungle, to tasting a diverse and delicious Asian street food market. Yes, in the Maldives, buffets still exist — and they're still amazing.

After four days, another 40-minute seaplane ride took me to [Conrad Maldives Rangali Island](#). I'll admit I spent most of my time in my newly refurbished beach villa, with an outdoor shower and relaxation area. The soothing water feature made combing through the hundreds of emails I've ignored over the past few weeks bearable, as did the promise of an afternoon massage. The true highlight was a three-course lunch surrounded by sharks and fish at [Ithaa Undersea Restaurant](#).

My last seaplane ride of the trip took me to the [St. Regis Maldives Vommuli Resort](#). I was delighted to find slightly stormy weather, complete with booming thunder. After weeks of sweltering sun, my burnt skin welcomed a break. One of my favorite overwater spas in the world, its [Iridium Spa](#) with [Blue Hole](#) hydrotherapy pools is a great place to spend a gray afternoon looking out at the horizon. When the sun did come out, [The Whale Bar](#), an overwater bar shaped like a giant whale-shark, was the place for a sunset cocktail.

Five weeks in the Maldives finished with a quick trip to [LUX* North Malé Atoll Resort & Villas](#). This all-white, Miami-esque resort surprised me with how spacious and modern the overwater villas were, including an expansive rooftop to host private movies and barbecues. The DJ played Harry Styles as I devoured an entire charcuterie pizza followed by Nutella ice cream handmade on the island.

I scrolled through my phone, looking for the video of my mom screaming down our private water slide at Soneva Jani. Thanks to each resort's individual COVID protocols, from fully masked staff to temperature checks in public spaces and masks required at the buffets, it made for the perfect pandemic getaway. While visiting ten resorts in one trip may have been slightly insane, it was completely worth it to spend more than a month in one of the world's most beautiful destinations.

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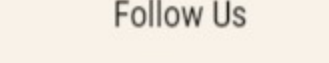
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