

ESCAPE

SAVOR THE FLAVORS
OF THE INDIAN OCEAN
AT EDGE, A FINE
DINING RESTAURANT
AT NIYAMA PRIVATE
ISLANDS MALDIVES.

Marooned in the MALDIVES

Walk—and sleep—on water at Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas and Niyama Private Islands Maldives, two extraordinary properties in the far reaches of the INDIAN OCEAN

By Paul Rubio

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ANANTARA KIHAVAH MALDIVES VILLAS SCENES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SNORKEL WITH MEGA MANTA RAYS; RELAX AT THE SPA OR OBSERVE THE NIGHT SKY AT SKY; DINE UNDERWATER AT SEA; INDULGE IN A FLOATING BREAKFAST SPREAD.



ANANTARA KIHAVAH MALDIVES VILLAS

This Maldives resort sets the bar for overwater excellence. From a swoon-worthy setting in Baa Atoll to over-the-top amenities and unwavering service, this is the bucket-list island experience lovers seek when dreaming of the Maldives.

First, get swept away by the dramatic natural backdrop. The resort branches above and across Kihavah Huravalhi, a picture-perfect island in Baa Atoll, a designated UNESCO Biosphere Reserve with dazzling turquoise waters and biodiverse coral reefs. Mounds of sugarloaf sands envelop the entirety of this lush island, blanketed in palm trees, screw pines, and native orchids. Sandy lanes, etched through the dense foliage, allow guests to traverse the island by bike or foot to reach on-land amenities, while wooden bridges lead to overwa-

ter extensions. Wade into the blue-ombré waters, submerge, and enter another dimension. The thriving house reef teems with Moorish idols and blue tangs—that's Gill and Dory in *Finding Nemo* terms—performing their latest synchronized swimming routines. Go deeper as spotted eagle rays and green turtles lead the way; venture even farther and join the seasonal migration of mega manta rays.

Next, luxuriate in Anantara Kihavah's thatched-roof overwater pool villa. A sleek and sizeable infinity pool lies at the villa's core, replacing a traditional living area and directly accessible from all nooks, including the high-design bedroom, the wow-factor bathroom, and the sprawling sun-deck. In-villa enticements—like a queen-sized bed swing, a duo of overwater hammocks, and a sunken, glass-bottomed bathtub—lead to the ultimate in private moments. Yet there's one moment you'll want to make public: the Instagram-perfect floating breakfast served in the comfort of your infinity pool. This buoyant tray of lobster benedict, smoked salmon, fresh fruits and juices, pastries, and top-shelf Champagne drifting toward the Indian Ocean is the true apex of food porn.

Finally, leave your love nest and discover the resort's next-generation amenities. There's an astronomy-themed rooftop bar, Sky, home to the Maldives' largest telescope, plus an otherworldly underwater restaurant, Sea, with front-row seats to Baa Atoll's prolific marine life. There's a glorious spa, Cocoon, staffed by an Ayurvedic specialist and touted as the Maldives' first and only luxury med spa. The island nation's sole Muay Thai boxing ring is also found here, run by a professional boxer. At



AT ANANTARA KIHAVAH, GUESTS CAN DINE IN THE SAND AND TAKE IN THE VIEWS IN THEIR OVERWATER POOL VILLA (ABOVE). NIYAMA'S OCEAN PAVILION SUITE (BELOW) BOASTS A PRIVATE INFINITY-EDGE POOL.

160-foot long, Anantara Kihavah's principal infinity pool is one of the Maldives' largest. Five beautifully appointed restaurants satisfy all foodie cravings from Mediterranean fare to local catch to Japanese teppanyaki, but you can also choose to dine on a private sand bar or in your villa.

All the while, island staff and a dedicated villa butler make this journey through overwater utopia a flawless and fabulous one; even the smallest requests are honored with gusto. Anantara Kihavah proves that heaven is just a long-haul flight away. (anantara.com)

NIYAMA PRIVATE ISLANDS MALDIVES

Most resorts in the Maldives cater to couples seeking privacy and relaxation—but not all. Case in point: Niyama Private Islands Maldives, which presents an alternative paradise, one with action-packed days, a family-friendly feel, and plenty of social happenings set in an extreme tropical dreamscape.

Connected by a small bridge, Niyama's two islands are aptly named Play and Chill. Play is ground zero for watersports. Fishing, snorkeling, kayaking, kneeboarding, wakeboarding, windsurfing, parasailing, kitesurfing, water skiing, and Jet Skiing are just a fraction of the 32 water activities on offer. Yet none garners as much attention as the surfing. Here, the surf breaks directly on the island's southern shore, creating a world-class point for all levels. Those with more skill can also ride the waves at Kasabu and Hocus Pocus, a five- and 10-minute speedboat ride away, respectively, while admirers can watch the action from the Surf Shack bar, rum cocktail in hand.

Thanks to a colossal kids' club and kid-approved amenities aplenty in the pool and beach areas, Play also attracts the lion's share of family travelers, who typically reside in the island's beach bungalows.



NIYAMA PRIVATE ISLANDS MALDIVES OFFERS AMPLE LOCALES THAT PRIORITIZE LAID-BACK LUXURY, INCLUDING THE DRIFT SPA (ABOVE) AND THE TREE-TOP NEST RESTAURANT (LEFT).

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DRESSED IN CONTEMPORARY DECOR, NIYAMA'S TWO-BEDROOM OCEAN PAVILION (ABOVE) IS LARGE ENOUGH FOR A FAMILY. AN AERIAL VIEW OF NIYAMA (LEFT) HIGHLIGHTS ITS OVERWATER ACCOMMODATIONS.

Having said that, families with a penchant for all things overwater can choose from a private cluster of villas called the Crescent, which can accommodate groups traveling together, up to 14 adults and eight children.

Meanwhile, on Chill, the Maldives' more familiar romantic side is on full display. The water pool villas hover over the crystalline shallows, each with a partial open-air shower, private pool, day bed, and deck with stairs leading directly into the water below. Drift Spa is a stunning feat of transitional indoor-outdoor architecture, where forest greens and ocean blues illuminate understated treatment sanctuaries. From Chill's northern tip, catch the 10-minute ferry to Niyama's floating dining and entertainment complex, underscored by modern fine dining restaurant Edge.

Edge; on Saturdays and Wednesdays the fun rages late with a glow party at the underwater nightclub Subsix.

Upon return to your luxe lair each night, a newsletter details the endless potentials for the next day. Think early morning yoga, aqua Zumba, coconut painting, TRX suspension training, and beach soccer for the adults; dolphin spotting, sand-art classes, and kite flying for the kids; dining in the treetops and movies under the stars for everyone. Of course, there's always the option to perfect the art of doing nothing and simply admire the exquisite surrounds. However, Niyama has found a niche with travel-savvy couples and families who ever questioned if boredom could strike while being marooned on a remote tropical island. The answer here: absolutely not. (niyama.com) ◀◀

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