

## BEST ISLANDS FOR FAMILIES



Kate Winslet on Amilla  
Fushi in the Maldives and,  
*opposite*, views of the hotel's  
villa residences and beach





# My favourite island is... Amilla Fushi

## KATE WINSLET

The six-times Oscar nominee, who stars in the Steve Jobs biopic and new heist thriller Triple 9, makes a swift getaway to the Maldives, photographed by her husband Ned Rocknroll

'My NAME IS Sadaam Hussein,' said our butler with a cheeky grin and a friendly flash of white teeth. 'Yes it's true! May I take your bag madam?'

Freshly arrived on Amilla Fushi by seaplane from Malé, we were surrounded by sweet, eager staff handing out ice-cold face towels and fat glasses of something pink and juicy which tasted like coconut, only better. Sadaam high-fived the kids

and dispatched the rest of the bags to our villa. Our new home turned out to be vast, modern and minimalist – like an urban five-star but without the noise and bustle – with deep ceramic baths, ocean-sized beds, and silent (and very welcome) air conditioning. Outside, we found not one but two swimming pools, surrounded by king-size sun beds, just a few feet from a powdery white-sand beach.

Just as we were thinking of finding something to eat, chef Nonky ('Pronounced donkey, but with an N') appeared in our private kitchen with trays of, well, options. Everything from Waygu beef to gigantic, grilled tiger prawns with garlic, chilli and lime, to sashimi of scallop and kingfish, sliced wafer thin, with a spicy dipping sauce. Delicious aromas filled the villa. Checking out the children's menu, I ➤



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The design at Amilla Fushi mixes modernist angles with tropical touches. Left, Kate Winslet relaxing at her Beach Residence

➤ was delighted to find chilled prawns with avocado and mango salsa, as well as salt and pepper squid with watercress salad. Hooray, a nugget-free zone! This was warming my heart. One of my children is quite severely wheat intolerant, but having gluten-free options meant pizza-night treats could go ahead without a hitch.

I've been mountain climbing in Iceland, parasailing in New Zealand and dog sledding in the Arctic, but haven't been to many beach resorts. So I'm not really used to being waited on, or being expected to relax, which I'm not very good at and quite expert at avoiding. So I arrived on Amilla Fushi ready for some action and

myself on one of our daily dives with sharks and mantra rays, they were tearing around the new, off-the-charts-amazing tennis courts under the watchful eye of coach Tony. And there was always a willing band of male staff members ready to kick a football around with my son, who's a little on the shy side and was really made to feel part of a team. In fact it became a bit of a ritual, as he'd race out the door at five o'clock to join his friends like a newcomer welcomed by local villagers.

Somehow a massage also worked its way into our routine. The island's Javu Spa is a sanctuary of eucalyptus- and chamomile-scented calm where staff

Soon we knew most staff members by name. We felt part of a family and even privy to some of its secrets. One day, after a 45-minute boat trip from the island we were dropped off with masks and fins and entered another world so breathtaking we felt we were in an animated film, such was the coral garden's surreal beauty. Each structure appeared to have tiny turrets and windows, with passageways and little corridors to swim down. Which we did, like water babies, surfacing between dives to shriek at each other in delight.

On the way home, we were treated to another rare sight: a school of dolphins decided to come and play, skimming

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energetic yoga sessions. That's why I was initially suspicious of my teacher's floaty outfit and the rose petals scattered on my yoga mat: you see, I struggle to get in touch with my chakras, or even listen to myself breathe for too long (I just start making lists). And yet, after five consecutive days of 90-minute sessions, low and behold, it was happening. She was getting under my skin. Darn! I was indeed relaxing; the to-do lists in my head vanished.

And so Amilla Fushi was beginning to work its magic on us all. If my children weren't gliding alongside my husband and

drift silently along its airy walkways, always with a smile. The Himalayan salt-crystal body scrubs left me feeling shiny and reborn, and the 90-minute full-body massage reduced me to a slippery, lavender-drenched, Bambi-like state.

The Kids' Club was a fabulous spot to take our toddler during massage time. It's perfectly positioned under tall, shady trees, with an immaculate, well-stocked play room and a safe, shallow pool. This warm, cocooning place was tended by gentle staff, without a hint of holiday-resort fakery or false enthusiasm.

alongside the boat at remarkable speed, leaping up and virtually over the bow. They seemed to giggle in tune with our own gleeful exclamations. And with chef Nonkey waiting at the villa ('It's lobster night!'), our last day proved to be a truly grand finale to our truly grand holiday. **📞** *Cleveland Collection* (+44 203 111 0805; [www.clevelandcollection.co.uk](http://www.clevelandcollection.co.uk)) offers seven nights at Amilla Fushi from £7,899 for a family of four, half board, staying in a Lagoon House Sunset View. This includes flights, transfers, and one 50-minute spa experience per adult

NICHOLAS COLERIDGE, MANAGING DIRECTOR, HAS NEVER FORGOTTEN ZANZIBAR'S MNEMBA ISLAND: THE WHITEST SAND, BLUEST SEA AND SWIMMING WITH WHALES