



Defiantly no-detox
Miranda keeps her cool

Miranda in the MALDIVES

She didn't fancy the sharks, or the celebs, or (worst of all) the overenthusiastic honeymooners. So could a swanky new island resort win over a sceptical **Miranda Hart**?

I have just been to a soft opening. If you are making up your own jokes, please don't be crass. This was a soft opening (stop it) of a new resort in the Maldives. I am writing this having been back in London for two days, and it feels like a dream that I was ever there. I never thought I would go to the Maldives. There were two reasons for this assumption.

First, I never thought it would be a possibility for someone like me. I saw the Maldives as an aspirational destination solely for honeymooners, the seriously rich or the seriously famous. That last group would go there and feel happy to be (and, in fact, be upset if they weren't) caught by the paparazzi on the beach showing off their post-detox bikini figure. I would go into a serious decline if I were photographed in my swimwear. I would probably go to bed for a few months to recover. No one wants to see a woman with sagging breasts and thighs that resemble a large hanging skewer of meat in a kebab shop in any publication. You are very much welcome for that image. It's one I am happy to live with, rather than have to go on anything resembling a detox. Dreadful word.

Second, I didn't actually think I wanted to go there. What I knew of the Maldives, was, yes, idyllic sea and sand, but also that each resort was on a tiny island and the accommodation consisted of a row of huts into the sea, in close proximity to one another. Put simply, I just thought I might go a tiny bit mad.

What happens if you want to swim but not in the sea, having seen a stingray

and a baby shark the day before and your childlike imagination has run away with you? (I saw *Jaws* at a formative age – don't judge me.) What happens if you get too hot and there is no breeze or shade? (Despite being naturally olive-skinned – thank you – I am British enough to want to punch someone in the face when I get too hot.) What happens if I am pitched next to overexcited honeymooners, if you very much know what I mean? (Scientifically proven to be the worst noise pollution ever.) What happens if the people on the other side like dance music? I could see myself sweating and grumpy, deafened by honeymooning shenanigans from a detoxed minor celebrity to dance music, and too worried about cutting myself on pieces of coral to cool off. You might be looking at a sunset in the Indian Ocean, but you might also go mad. So I considered the Maldives very much off my travel agenda.

Then I heard about a new Maldivian resort: Amilla Fushi. Yes, it has ocean houses on stilts, but also one- and two-bedroom beach houses, and larger residences. It's on a bigger island, so you can go for a walk if claustrophobia hits. There are individual good-sized pools for every house, but also the largest communal pool in the Maldives. I looked at the website and was immediately sold. Off three friends and I went.

There was slight trepidation, as we were aware that "soft opening" (here we are again) might be code for "building site", and the website images might have been enhanced. We all know the disappointment at the contrast between website pictures and reality (I blame estate agents). But as we stepped onto the island's jetty for the first time, we were speechless. The water was crystal-clear bright turquoise, as dramatic and defined as the website images. As we got the boat over from the small airport island, dolphins played in our wake. You could see from the jetty, let alone snorkelling, the jaw-dropping colours of the fish feeding on coral that look as if they must be digitally enhanced by Disney. The infinity pool was the most beautiful I have ever swum in, looking out west to the shimmering sea and perfect sunsets.

Right: so the island is stunning – nay, perfect. What have they done with it as a holiday resort? Because that's the thing about the Maldives. You are aware of the





scale of the natural beauty, but also of being in a place that it's hard to believe can be populated. You feel the significance of being in the middle of the Indian Ocean. I felt like apologising to the birds and fish for invading their island. (I did actually get caught vocalising, "Hello, and thanks for having me", to a lizard I named Larry). So I found myself a little confused about whether the luxury Amilla Fushi has created was OK.

On arrival, your personal *katheeb* (what other resorts call a butler) takes you on a golf cart to your accommodation. Feels a bit Brangelina and unnecessary, especially when the island is about five minutes' walk wide and 10 minutes' walk long. And the notion of a *katheeb* at your beck and call is always going to be uncomfortable for any Brit (most of us still clean up for the cleaner). We went via an open-air cinema and saw that behind the amazing swimming pool there was what the resort calls the Bazaar: five restaurants in a row, including a fish-and-chip shop. There was music pumping at the pool and at the restaurants. Alarm bells rang. We spied some kayaks and a paddleboard. Lovely. But then saw wetbikes and a speedboat with one of those large inflatable bananas to tow behind. Hmm. Isn't that more Marbella than Maldives?

Then we arrived on the other side of the island, at a private beach house. It was heavenly. Beautifully decorated, set back from the beach, surrounded by lush palm trees for privacy and shade, but with a view from the bed (let alone terrace) of that shimmering sea and perfect white sand. It felt suitably respectful of the surrounding beauty and I instantly knew it was a place where I could rest and restore — particularly as the shading and sea breeze allayed my overheating fear. My friends chose the clammier Lagoon Houses (my dreaded huts on stilts), but they were expertly done: separate enough to drown out honeymooners, much bigger than I imagined, with a bathroom to die for, a



ladder down to the sea and a significant plunge pool.

There might be a row of restaurants and an inflatable banana, but you can totally do the Maldives how you can. We dined predominantly in our rooms (the food was amazing — no detoxing here). We had our daily massage (it's included) in the shade by the beach, not in a formal spa. And any formality or stuffiness a golf buggy, *katheeb* and a luxury resort might create was subverted cleverly at every level. Our butlers, Aysha and Munad, became firm friends. They made our holiday bespoke at every turn. They took us on sunset cruises, and when they realised we had a love of the beach beanbags, put them on top of the boat for us. A

flippant mention of Magnush and, the next day, they presented us with them for pudding, having sourced them from a larger island. We were boated to a deserted island for a picnic lunch. Yes, they did it luxuriously, going ahead to put up umbrellas for shade, but the food was served at a table and seat made out of sand, in keeping with the vibe.

We didn't do the inflatable banana — that didn't feel right — but we did go on the wetbikes. They were made safe and fun by more fabulous staff, who reassured me that there were no sharks, and that the

Above, the view from a Lagoon House; left, even the treehouses come with pools; below, supper from the only fish-and-chip shop in the Maldives

sting rays were shy beasts who looked more alarming than they were (they really shouldn't have the word "sting" in their name, it's off-putting).

We were really free to be ourselves. Are there many resorts you would feel comfortable having a handstand competition in the pool as a fortysomething? Probably not. (I won, by the way, though I don't like to show off about it.) Or, when going to the outdoor cinema, happily choose *The Little Mermaid*, despite there being no children in our party? We didn't need to be honeymooners, seriously famous or seriously rich (though you can't be poor, either — see below).

Amilla Fushi did us proud — and I can safely and genuinely say it was the best holiday I have ever had. The only reservation I have in saying "go, go, go" is that we were at the afore- and pretty much had the island to ourselves. There is a chance in the beach houses you would hear and see your neighbours (and it is a family-friendly resort), there could be screams on a banana boat, there might be pumping music in the pool. Obviously, that's a lot of people's bags, but our bags were firmly packed with a need for peace, absorbing the beauty of the island and, well, a late night being 10.05pm.

But I like to think even if the island were full, you would still get that. I am determined to go back and find out when it's fully completed. Because, really, there aren't many places on this wonderful planet you can totally get away from everyone and everything. This could be the best island resort to holiday on for us all. I shouldn't really be telling you about it.

● Miranda Hart was a guest of Cleveland Collection (020 7135 2436, clevelandcollection.co.uk/amilla), which has seven huts from £2,998pp, half-board. The price is valid for travel between May 11 and October 15, and includes return flights, transfers, all watersports and a daily 50-minute spa treatment. For more information, go to visitmaldives.com



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