



## TOP DIGS FOR TOP DOGS

Clients with plenty of money find the Maldives the most exclusive of destinations

The Maldives is a great recommendation for clients looking for something new and exotic.

The high-end traveler takes notice when such movie stars as Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, people who can go anywhere, choose the Maldives for their honeymoon. As the hotel industry continues to build for top-end clients, you'll see more and more luxury resorts plant flags in the Maldives. Over the next four years some 50 new resorts will join the 89 that are already in operation in the 1,192-island country with its one-resort-per-island policy. As the inventory has grown, so too has its reputation. In 2007, the Maldives set a record number of 675,889 visitors (a growth of some 13 percent over 2006), with nearly 80 percent from Europe. But don't be fooled by the numbers, the Maldives is a completely five-star destination.

As Mario Scosia, the president of A&A S.E. Asia Tours, put it, "If you've arrived in the Maldives, it indicates that you have arrived at a level of wealth that sets you apart; just being there is a marker of achievement. It's only for those who have the money, the time and the spirit to enjoy the best sun-and-sand destination in the world. Most people haven't even heard of the Maldives, and only a tiny percentage can afford them, but they're very profitable to sell. I recently handled a nine-day, land-only honeymoon that priced out at \$9,700 per person. And by the way, the level of service, beauty and accommodation makes it worth every dime."

According to Liz Kea, the marketing manager for Island Destinations, "We added the Maldives in 2004, and it has sold extremely well for us ever since. We find that it really appeals to the traveler who loves the most luxuri-

ous resort experiences. For instance, if an agent had clients who love the best Caribbean resorts or the best of Tahiti, the Maldives is a great recommendation when they're looking for something new and exotic. It's particularly attractive to scuba divers, because the diving there is simply the best."

The Maldives evolved as an idyllic outpost over the centuries because it offered Indian Ocean traders a stopover on their journeys from Arabia, China and India; they often could use coconut, dried fish and cowry shells as currency. Hordes of cowry shells originating from the Maldives have been found as far away as Norway or West Africa. In 1965, the Maldives achieved independence from Great Britain, which had acquired the islands in the 1880s.

Visitors to the Maldives spend their time in the resort spas, sailing, deep-sea fishing and exploring some of the most-revered coral reefs in the world. While it's very difficult to select the best of the island's resorts, a short list would have to include the One&Only, Anantara, the Four Seasons' two properties, the Six Senses and the Conrad.

The resorts strive to push the envelope as deeply into high luxury as possible. Take the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island ([maldivesinfo@conradhotels.com](mailto:maldivesinfo@conradhotels.com)) as an example. Perched over two islands linked by a bridge, the resort features water villas, beach villas and spa water villas (each with a private treatment room). Among its seven restaurants is the world's only all-glass undersea restaurant.

Anantara's Maldives ([www.anantara.com](http://www.anantara.com)) resort lies 35 minutes by private speedboat from Malé International Air-

port. Guests hop between the resort's two islands, one offering 68 beachfront villas, with outdoor bathrooms and rain showers. Two beachfront pool villas are more spacious and come with private plunge pools. The 38 over-water suites feature private sundecks and open-air, infinity-edged bathtubs with a view. Two exclusive deluxe over-water pool suites sit at the end of each jetty, with wrap-around sundecks featuring private plunge pools.

The One&Only Kanuhura ([www.oneandonlyresorts.com](http://www.oneandonlyresorts.com)), one of two One&Onlys in the Maldives, features 100 private villas, each opening directly to the sea. This luxury resort also features an award-winning spa, as well as two bars and four restaurants. The resort's Kid'sOnly program is a complimentary club for younger guests. It's a fully supervised children's club, with a dedicated shallow pool and sand playground, offering daily activities and baby-sitting facilities. Transfer to the resort is via a 40-minute seaplane ride from Malé International Airport. One&Only Kanuhura is a member of The Leading Hotels of the World.

The Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru (800-332-3442, [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com)) lies about 70 miles north of Malé and employs traditional Maldivian architectural principles, from the concept of individual domains rather than guestrooms, to the 45-degree pitched thatched roofs and the use of coral walls. Entry to each residential domain is via its own turquoise gate, guaranteeing complete privacy. The resort's Landaa Spa & Ayurvedic Retreat features open-air facilities that make the lush tropical setting an integral part of the treatment processes.

*continued on page 128*