



# Blast Resort

NASA-approved medical assessments, multi-sensory swing pods, bespoke wellness programmes, sports facilities galore... Velaa Private Island is not just Maldivian luxury at its finest; if you're suffering executive burnout, it's just what the doctor ordered too

When azure skies and stretches of palm-fringed sand lapped by cerulean seas are a given, how does a resort go that extra mile? How can a flawless tropical paradise become the most restorative, sybaritic and extravagantly fun place to be on the planet? Several ways, in the case of Velaa Private Island on the Noonu Atoll, a 45-minute seaplane hop from the capital Malé.

Velaa is a passion project for Czech financier owner Jiri Smejč – an amalgam of his luxury holiday priorities, accumulated over countless weeks spent in the Maldives. This resort doesn't have a wine cellar: it has the largest wine and champagne collection in the Maldives, including a US\$53,000 (around £41,000) bottle of 1978 Romanée-Conti Grand Cru, housed in a Tolkienesque 37-foot, three-storey tower whose design was inspired by a butterfly cocoon. It doesn't have a water sports centre; it has

a cavernous storeroom filled with jet-skis, Seabobs, paddleboards, sailboards, kite surfing and scuba diving gear, and even offers a Weta Trimaran and a Topcat K1 catamaran for daily charter.

The pedestrian offerings of a mere spa are not for Velaa guests: here, a bespoke holistic programme – think Asian-inspired therapies including Ayurveda, yoga and meditation – is created by resident health professionals, based on a NASA-approved InBody test which gives a comprehensive overview of your body composition (water, proteins, minerals, fat and so on). There's also a snow room in which to escape the average 30°C heat, and – New Age-a-phobes look away – a cloud-shaped multi-sensory pod that cradles and swings guests into a meditative stupor.

Golf course? How about a lush, nine-tee'd, six-greened affair with a swing



studio designed by Spanish pro José María Olazábal (there's also a covered tennis court and a squash court). Children's facilities? The kids' club has a playground, dedicated pool and a seemingly endless range of activities designed for 4-12 year olds. Parents who prefer more edifying pastimes for their offspring might want to take them to witness hatchlings at the turtle nursery (conservation efforts are just one way the island pays homage to the creatures with whom it shares a shape: "Velaa" means "turtle" in the local language).

The quest for excellence manifests itself in every detail: in the floor stones imported from Jordan for their comfort-enhancing ability to absorb heat; in the specially commissioned dumbbells in the gym, sourced for bodybuilders whose ambitions lie outside of the conventional weight range; in the endlessly capable and composed personal butlers (owner Smejč cherry-picked his staff from the region's best hotels).

And yet, for all this extra mile-ism, the décor in the accommodation – 45 exclusive villas and residences, some on the beach (all have their own private stretch of coral shoreline) or overwater on stilts – is admirably muted. Petr Kolár, the Czech architect behind the project, has coined a motto for the resort: "polite luxury". And he's not merely referring to airs and graces on the staff's part: it also means understated and discreet in terms of villa design. Think louvered wood, natural materials, rattan chairs, and lights suspended from vaulted ceilings.

Making such a remote island a culinary destination involves more logistical hurdles than the casual visitor might imagine. But the three restaurants here prove that all things are possible with the requisite budgets and common sense. At the main eatery, Aragu, hovering above a lagoon, executive chef Gaushan de Silva (a former private chef at the queen of Jordan's royal palace) puts a global spin on European cuisine: remember to visit the Cru Champagne Bar and Lounge across the jetty before dining, and check out the flying fish decorations.

Beachfront restaurant Athiri is where to get the kind of breakfast buffet you might expect in Paris or L.A., or delectable wood-fired oven pizzas in the evenings; Tavaru, found at the top of the same ivory-coloured tower as the wine cellar – is where guests sit around the



From far left: arriving by seaplane is encouraged; ocean views from the spa; Seabobs are available to play with; practice your swing on the golf greens; the eye-catching Tavaru restaurant



chef's zone, watching their teppanyaki grill cuisine being prepared with as much repartee as dazzling skill, while taking in panoramic views of the crystalline Indian Ocean.

So how to spend a perfect day in this manicured jungle haven of orderly abundance, built from scratch for around £155 million? There are endless potential itineraries, but we'd suggest that zipping over to a nearby uninhabited island on a jet-ski, a Spa My Blend By Clarins treatment, participation in stingray feeding at dusk and pre-prandials at the Cru Champagne Bar and Lounge should all be in the mix.

Be sure to drink to good health when it comes to the latter. After all, you're in the perfect place to restore it. – Nick Scott  
**A Beach Pool Villa starts at £2,355 per night; a Velaa Private Residence costs from £19,700 per night (government tax and service charge not included).**

