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# Short Breaks

Looking for a weekend getaway close to home?

Some of the world's most exciting cities, resorts and experiences are less than a five-hour flight from (or a short drive within) the UAE – and easily explored in just three to four days. Whether it's a relaxing retreat, an adrenaline-fuelled weekend, a glitzy spending spree or an enlightening cultural trip, this is your definitive guide to when to go, where to go and what to see.

20 destinations, from emerging cities to iconic landmarks

### South Asia

- Goa
- North India
- Kerala
- Maldives
- Nepal
- Sri Lanka

### Africa

- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- Kenya
- Seychelles

### Eurasia

- Azerbaijan
- Cyprus
- Georgia
- Turkey

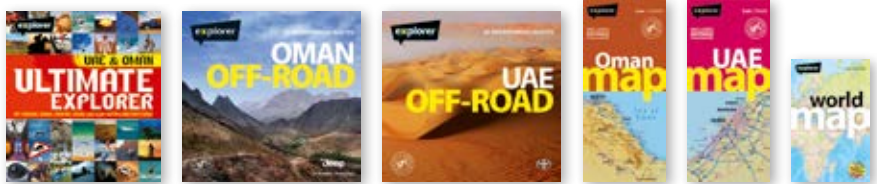
### Middle East

- Bahrain
- Jordan
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- Qatar
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Plus... handpicked hotels | day trips | defining experiences  
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Short Breaks

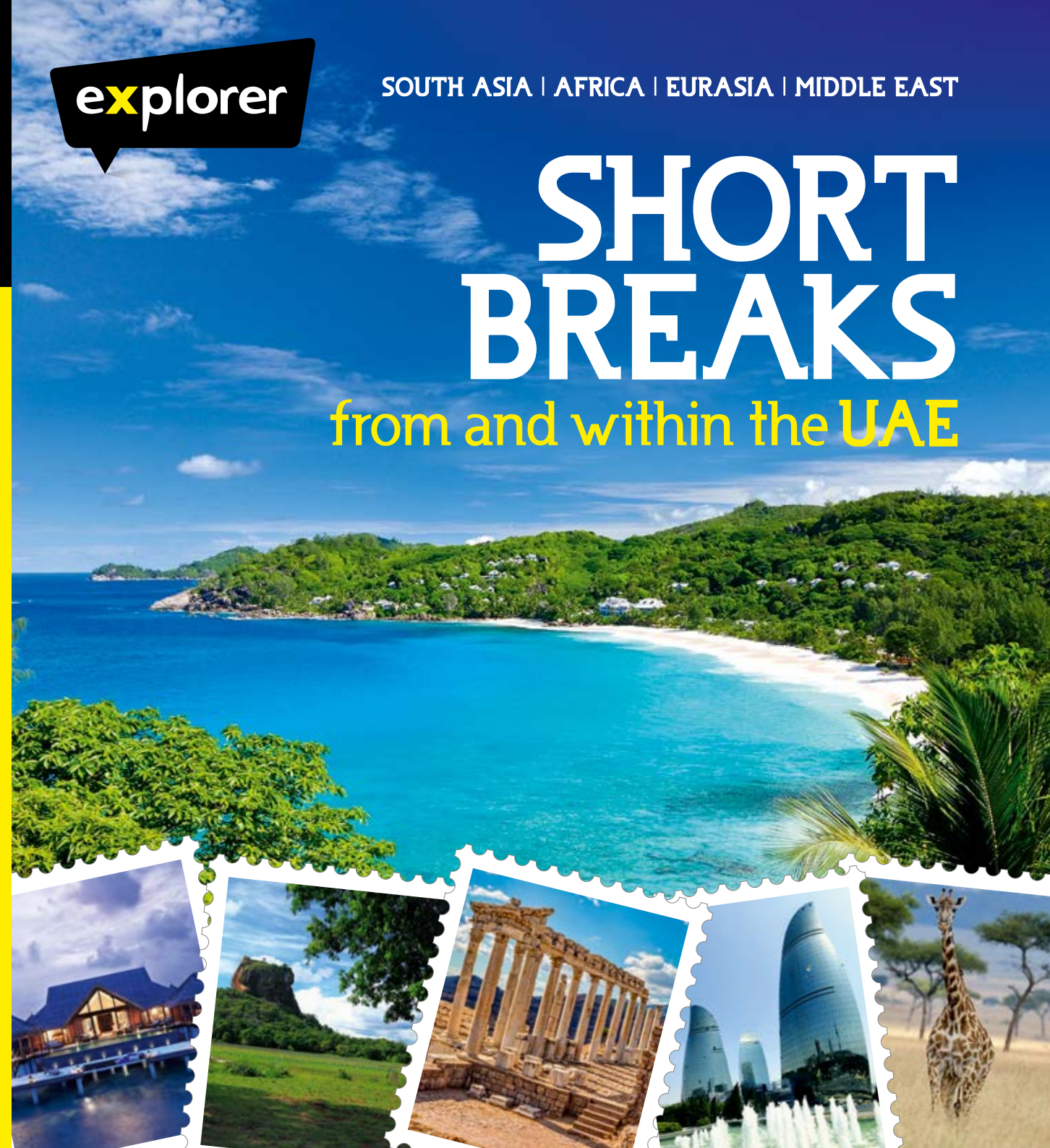
from and within the UAE



SOUTH ASIA | AFRICA | EURASIA | MIDDLE EAST

# SHORT BREAKS


from and within the UAE




# North India

In a nation known for its colour and opulence, Rajasthan and Delhi outshine their neighbours with a dazzling landscape of palaces, monuments, forts and bazaars.

 **Flight time**  
3 hours 20 minutes

 **Door to door**  
40 minutes by car from Delhi airport to New Delhi; 30 minutes by car from Jaipur airport to Jaipur; four hours' drive or 30 minutes' flight from Delhi to Jaipur

 **When to go**  
October to March

From the Pink City of Jaipur and the red sandstone of Rajasthan's forts, to the gleaming white marble of the Taj Mahal and the 'Blue City' of Jodhpur, northern India is a vibrant, colourful land. There are the parched ochre dunes of the Thar Desert sands, the silver streets of Chandni Chowk and the array of reds and oranges of a classic New Delhi sunset across the city's rooftops. The neighbouring regions of Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh are fascinating, diverse, historically rich, romantic and, above all, make up one of the most beautiful places on earth.

If ever there was a time to step out of your comfort zone, it is in Rajasthan – where maharajah-gilded palaces, exuberant

festivals and sprawling tiger reserves are set amongst a contrasting landscape of haunting desert, serene lakes and green hills.

The capital of this massive state is Jaipur, a fairytale and exotic land of breathtaking palaces, local handicrafts and historic monuments. Neighbouring Delhi, home to India's capital city New Delhi, embodies everything there is to love and hate about India's frenzied urbanity. It's a city with a wealth of cultural, spiritual, artistic and culinary delights – and where sacred cows wander crowded streets, hawkers sell brightly coloured tapestries, rich silks and exotic fabrics, and pedestrians are narrowly avoided by the cars and rickshaws that fight their way along narrow streets.

## The Golden Triangle

This well travelled route hosts three of North India's greatest cultural gems, including Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. Popular with first timers to India or those on a shorter timeframe, most tourists fly to Delhi, travel southwards to the site of the famous Taj Mahal at Agra, then west to the ethereal Pink City of Jaipur. The circuit is about 1,000km by road, and each leg is about five hours' drive; the faster and very scenic way to travel the Golden Triangle, however, is by speedy Shatabdi train. This is your chance to see the ancient Qutab Minar and witness the enthralling chaos of New Delhi, stand at one of the world's most iconic landmarks, and ride an elephant to the Amber Fort amongst the desert landscapes of Rajasthan. And all in just three or four days.

## North India Essentials

In a nation that bursts with smiling faces and infectious, jingoistic pride, you won't be out of your comfort zone for long.



### Getting there

Fly from Sharjah, Dubai or Abu Dhabi to Delhi with Air Arabia, Emirates, Etihad and Jet Airways. Fly from Dubai or Sharjah to Jaipur with Air Arabia and Air India Express. Flights from Dhs.900 return.

### Visas

Most foreign nationals need to obtain a visa before entering India. BLS (blsindiavisa-uae.com) visa service delivers your passport and visa back to you, usually within four days.

### Time

One hour 30 minutes ahead of the UAE.

### Climate

Broadly speaking, it has a subtropical climate with a monsoon season from July to September. Temperatures average 26°C-45°C in summer and 8°C-22°C in winter.

### Language

Hindi, but English is widely spoken.

### Currency

Indian Rupee (INR). 100 INR = Dhs.65.

### Vaccinations

Hepatitis A and B, Polio and Typhoid. Malaria tablets are recommended.

### Best for... train journeys

Perhaps the quintessential Indian experience, trains are a great way to meet the locals and absorb the melting pot of India on the move. Travelling on overnight services allows you to cover vast distances while saving time. Services run surprisingly regularly, fares are extremely cheap and you can book tickets online at [makemytrip.com](http://makemytrip.com).



## North India Highlights

It's easy to fall head over heels in love with this country – from cosmopolitan, frenetic Delhi to the magnificent forts and palaces of Jaipur.



## Jaipur

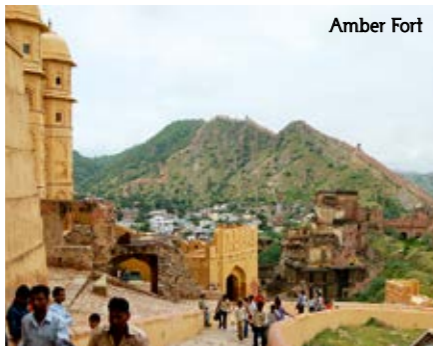
The architectural opulence of Rajasthan's lively capital, a city truly built for a king, is a sight to behold.

### City Palace

Housing the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, this stunning palace was built by the Rajputs in the 18th century, and the royal family still reside in the complex. The Peacock Gate alone is worth seeing for its exquisite detailing, and the museum is a fascinating insight into Rajput regal life.

### Palace of the Winds

Towering above the old town's main thoroughfare, this ornate facade was built for the royal ladies in purdah. The thin walls are covered with stone lattice work which allowed them to watch the activity of the town, but prevented people from seeing in.



Amber Fort



### Bazaars & markets

The labyrinthine central market of Jaipur is a riot of colour, with brightly dressed locals selling all handicrafts and edible treats. For the finest Indian sweets a stop at the LMB store in Jauhari Bazaar is a must. The adjoining restaurant serves up delicious chaat (snacks) and Rajasthani thali in kitsch surrounds.

### Raj Mandir Cinema

This stunning art deco building has a lobby decorated in icing sugar pinks and blues with glittering mirrors and chandeliers. It's like stepping into a fairytale palace.

### Amber Fort & Palace

Well worth the short journey from the Pink City, this is one of Rajasthan's most spectacular royal forts and reminiscent of China's Great Wall. The incredibly grand interior bears intricate mosaics, mirrors and frescoes, while a sound and light show transforms the imposing exterior each evening. Elephants are on hand to carry visitors to the fort in true royal style.

### Sariska National Park

Conveniently located between the area's biggest transport hubs of Jaipur and Delhi, Sariska is home to the Royal Bengal tiger, and is popular with visitors eager to get a glimpse of one. As well as an abundance of wildlife, the area has a wealth of history, with Kankwari Fort and ancient Shiva Temples, that go back as far as the sixth century, both fascinating sites to visit.



Jodhpur

### Tiger trail

After a brief hiatus when the government closed India's tiger reserves, tiger tourism is back in a big way and Ranthambore National Park is one of the best places in India to spot these elusive creatures. It's also home to other wildlife, including leopards, crocodiles and chameleons.



Mehrangarh Fort

## Rajasthan

Journeying through this Indian state is every bit as magical as you'd imagine, with a glittering landscape of lakes, forests and desert, and majestic architecture.

### Jaisalmer

Right in the heart of the Thar Desert is Jaisalmer. While it's fun to whiz around the city in a tuk-tuk, stopping to admire Jaisalmer Fort, the real spectacles are the breathtaking sand dunes and water tanks.

### Jodhpur

At the centre of the 'Land of Kings' is this bustling city famed for its majestic monuments and temples, such as Jaswant Thada, and vivid blue houses. Batman fans may recognise buildings from *The Dark Knight Rises*, most notably Mehrangarh Fort. Perhaps the most impressive of Rajasthan's forts, this was described by Rudyard Kipling as 'the work of angels, fairies and giants'.

### Udaipur

Romantic and picturesque, Udaipur gives a perfectly proportioned slice of Indian life. It's built around Lake Pichola, an awe-inspiring artificial lake encircled by temples, lush greenery, bathing ghats and palaces. Enjoy views of the city from the water aboard a traditional shikara boat or hire a guide for a day-long excursion to City Palace. This architectural spectacle neighbours a bustling bazaar, and further afield is the magnificent Kumbhalgarh Fort.



To enjoy the tranquility and wildlife of the Thar Desert stay overnight in a tented camp. From riding a camel across the Sam sand dunes to cooking flatbread on an open fire and sleeping under the stars – it's an unforgettable experience.

## North India Highlights



### On the buses

The best and fastest way to see the city sights is to jump onboard the Hop On Hop Off bus tour ([hohodelhi.com](http://hohodelhi.com)), which visits the top 20 attractions across Delhi, with the added bonus of witty anecdotes from English and Hindi speaking guides.

## Delhi

For a city break with a difference, explore the maze-like lanes and alleys of Old Delhi and the tree-lined avenues and colonial buildings of the capital, New Delhi.

### Delhi belly

From shawarma to fresh fruit beer, momos (dumplings) to banta, a delicious lemon-based drink that's an ideal refreshment for hot Delhi weather, there's plenty to sample on a fulfilling food tour of Delhi. [urbanadventures.com](http://urbanadventures.com)



### New Delhi

First impressions of a country count – and if this is your first stop-off in India, it won't disappoint. It's a sprawling metropolis with a heady cocktail of spice, incense and petrol in the air. Catch the metro to visit architectural wonders such as Humayun's Tomb, with its domes, decorative pillars and water features, and Qutab Minar, an early Indo-Islamic feat of engineering. A visit to Gandhi Smriti will show you the exact spot where Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, was assassinated on January 30, 1948. The towering archway of India Gate is a striking war memorial best viewed at sunset.

### Old Delhi

The best way to soak up the melee of smells and sights of the old city is by spending some time walking along its streets. Cars, rickshaws, hand-pulled carts, and animals all compete for space in this frenetic city, but a pair of comfy shoes and map will get you off on the right foot. Old Delhi's most famous monument, the Red Fort, stands as a powerful reminder of the Mughal emperors who ruled India; there's nothing better to imagine the ancient era than the sound and light show at the fort each evening. A shocking contrast to the wide, orderly streets of New Delhi is the network of narrow, winding bazaars in the 300-year-old Chandni Chowk – India's ultimate shopping destination. Other treasures include the incredible Jama Masjid, India's largest mosque.

### When to visit

The Taj Mahal is open from dawn to dusk, and is closed on Fridays. Adult entrance costs around Dhs.50 for non-Indian nationals. Upon reaching the Taj Mahal, an onslaught of 'guides' will jostle for your attention – and your money. These are not licensed guides and should be avoided – they will basically harass you until you pay them to go away.

## Agra

The enduring pull of the 350-year-old Taj Mahal is reason enough to make the pilgrimage to Agra.

### Taj Mahal

One of the world's most cherished and iconic landmarks, the Taj Mahal is on every self-respecting traveller's bucket list. Built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as an expression of devotion to his late wife, India's most famous tomb is a must for anyone visiting North India. With more than three million visitors every year, you won't be alone, but when you're soaking up the exquisite architecture and intricately detailed craftsmanship, all else will fade to the periphery. The best time to visit is early morning, in time to watch the dawn light bathe the monument in an ethereal glow.

Agra can be reached on a day trip from Delhi, but the city does have some other impressive sights, including Agra Fort, that make an overnight stay worth the stop.

### Fatehpur Sikri

For an interesting day trip, Fatehpur Sikri is 40km west of Agra. This fascinating ghost town was built during the 16th century by Mughal emperor Akbar as a new capital. Geographically speaking, it wasn't his best idea and due to a lack of groundwater reserves the city was abandoned after he died. A wander round the beautifully preserved red sandstone palaces and Islamic monuments serves as a wonderful insight into the Mughals and their civilisation.



From Delhi, Agra is just three hours, and companies such as [onthegotours.com](http://onthegotours.com) offer private guided tours. Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation ([delhitourism.nic.in](http://delhitourism.nic.in)) runs a cheaper bus tour, three times a week. It's a 14-hour day trip with an early 5am start, but there's plenty of time to snooze en route.



## North India Places to stay



Taj Lake Palace

# Rajasthan

## Aman-i-Khas

Experience Ranthambore National Park, one of India's best for spotting tigers, from this luxurious tented base close to a natural watering hole. Excursions into the park in open-top vehicles can be arranged if you can drag yourself away from the comfort of the camp and its spa facilities.

[amanresorts.com](http://amanresorts.com)

## The Blue House

This budget-friendly option in Jodhpur is a family-run place with great views of Mehrangarh Fort, which is lit at night to give it an even greater sense of majesty. Rooms are simple but with fun décor, and home-cooked meals can be enjoyed on the rooftop.

## Manvar Resort & Camp

The latest trend for exploring Rajasthan is from a luxury camp, and this desert camp in the Thar Desert is one example. Comfortable en suite safari tents are plushly furnished. Evenings are an experience, with traditional music and dance around the campfire. Your toes may be in the sand but this is some seriously upmarket glamping. [manvar.com](http://manvar.com)

## The Oberoi Udaivilas

This sumptuous resort in Udaipur is built in the style of a traditional Indian palace with fountains, courtyards and gardens. Accessed by boat ride across Lake Pichola, all the rooms have terraces and a pool. Yoga and meditation sessions are available at the resort spa, a haven of serenity overlooking the lake. [oberoihotels.com](http://oberoihotels.com)

## Taj Lake Palace

Rising like a mirage from the shimmering waters of Lake Pichola, this ridiculously grand hotel will make you feel like a maharajah. Its romantic setting in the middle of the lake ensures unbeatable views, while attentive staff, dressed in traditional regalia, will pander to your every whim. [tajhotels.com](http://tajhotels.com)

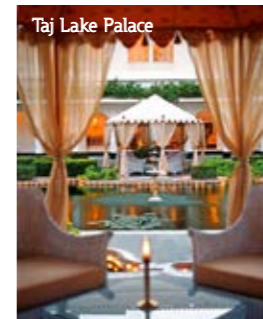
askexplorer.com

Manvar Resort & Camp



Luxury camps are the hippest way of experiencing the land of the kings

Taj Lake Palace



Aman-i-Khas



Although Judi Dench, Bill Nighy and co. were rather disappointed to wash up at the *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, the actual location for the film is a rather charming heritage hotel, Ravla Khempur, which is set amongst some beautiful scenery in a remote and peaceful part of Rajasthan. ([ravlakhempur.com](http://ravlakhempur.com))

## North India Places to stay

### Jaipur

#### Alsisar Haveli

A taste of regal Rajasthani life doesn't have to break the bank, and Jaipur's heritage hotels have been lovingly restored to provide an evocative base from which to explore the city's history. Rooms at Alsisar Haveli, located in the heart of the Pink City, are richly furnished with antique furniture. [alsisarhaveli.com](http://alsisarhaveli.com)

#### Barwara Kothi

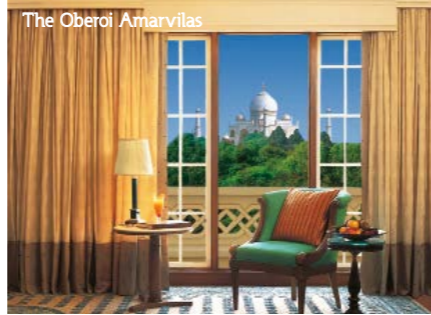
Owned and run by Jaipur nobility, Barwara Kothi gets great reviews from travellers for its reasonable rates, homely atmosphere, spotless rooms and friendly hosts. It is conveniently close to the city centre in a bright colonial villa. [barwarakothi.com](http://barwarakothi.com)

#### lebua Lodge at Amer

Just outside Jaipur, away from the chaos of the city, is this quirky and serene 'camp', with futuristic cubic tents, each with TV, AC, wi-fi and marble bathrooms. Unique five-star chic without the sterility. [lebua.com](http://lebua.com)

#### Tree House Resort

Be at one with nature in a 'nest' at this quirky-yet-luxurious tree dwelling camp. Tree houses come in different sizes, from one room to an enormous five-room tree-mansion. Facilities are top-notch, so you'll be rather surprised to see that there are branches poking through the ceiling. [treehousesort.in](http://treehousesort.in)



### Delhi

#### LaLiT New Delhi

For a more chic experience of India's chaotic capital, the LaLiT is a haven of calm. An antithesis to the flamboyance of the city's architecture, the clean decor of this trendy hotel retains a level of plush sophistication without overdoing it. Rooms are spacious, and the spa offers Ayurvedic therapies to wash away the furore of the city. [thelalit.com](http://thelalit.com)

#### Taj Mahal Hotel

Luxurious surroundings and impeccable service are pretty much guaranteed from Indian hotel giant Taj Group, and this New Delhi institution is no exception. A social hub for the city's in-crowd who are attracted to its prime address, award-winning bars and restaurants and glamorous setting, the Taj Mahal Hotel is a safe bet for those looking for the Delhi high life. [tajhotels.com](http://tajhotels.com)

### Agra

#### The Oberoi Amarvilas

With arguably one of the best views in the world, this luxurious resort facing the Taj Mahal is almost as lavish as the monument it reverently overlooks. While this prime position doesn't come cheap, a front row seat as the sun rises atmospherically over the Taj Mahal is surely a priceless experience. [oberoihotels.com](http://oberoihotels.com)



lebua Lodge at Amer



The Oberoi Amarvilas

# In the footsteps of maharajahs

## Sightseeing by train



### All aboard

The Maharajas' Express three-night Treasures of India tour departs once a month, from October 2013 to April 2014. (the-maharajas.com)

If you're craving an adventure coloured by centuries' old history, then the Maharajas' Express should be your next stop.



Amber Fort

Few destinations can excite the imagination quite like India, and exploring this diverse and fascinating destination by train is a travel fantasy for many. The Maharajas' Express Treasures of India tour allows you to do just that, taking in some of its brightest gems over just three nights and four days, including Agra, Ranthambore, Jaipur and Delhi.

### Day one

The Maharajas' Express departs from where most journeys around India begin: New Delhi, leaving the capital city first thing in the morning. After a traditional welcome, the whistle blows and it's full steam ahead. A lavish brunch is served as the crowded urban landscape of New Delhi transforms into green countryside sprinkled with dusty rural villages. Pulling into Agra in the afternoon, it is time for a tour of UNESCO World Heritage Site, Agra Fort. This impressive monument dates back to the Mughal Emperors of the 16th century. The train is then stationed in Agra for the night, so it's time to relax, have some dinner, and hit the bar for a champagne-fuelled evening.

Taj Mahal



### Home comforts

You might not expect much luxury when travelling by train, but the Maharajas' Express really does feel like a home away from home. All the passenger cabins have an LCD TV, DVD player, phone and internet access, and individual temperature controls.

### Day two

The second day begins with a visit to India's most instantly recognisable icon: the Taj Mahal. After enough time to admire (and photograph) this centuries-old homage to love in the early dawn light, it's time to board the train for lunch, and a journey to a far wilder attraction: Ranthambore National Park. A game drive at the reserve takes you on a quest to find the elusive Royal Bengal tiger amongst the foliage of the wilderness, before getting back onboard for dinner as the train whisks you rhythmically towards Jaipur.

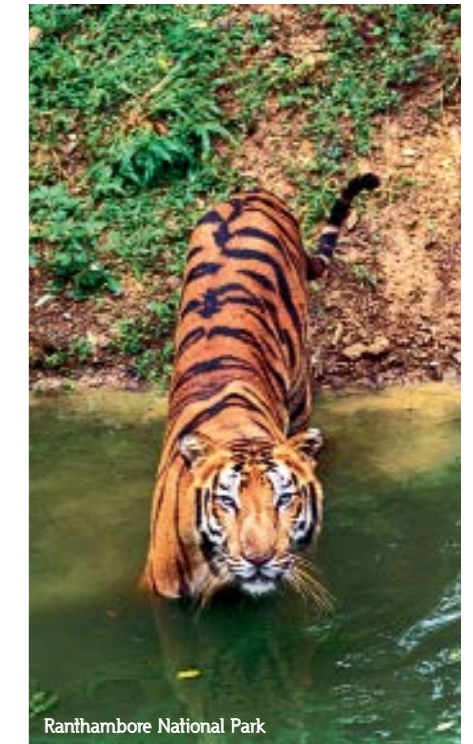
### Day three

Arriving in Jaipur is truly unforgettable, and at its heart is the old town, the walled Pink City. The colour, which is similar to that of the red stone used in Delhi's central monuments, doesn't come from the stones; in fact, the buildings were painted. This dates back to a visit from the Prince of Wales in the late 1800s, when the town was turned pink to honour his arrival. Since Jaipur was once the seat of Indian royalty, it's time to take in some regal relics and awesome architecture. The final full day of the

Maharajas' Express tour involves a visit to the 16th century Amber Fort and Palace, regarded as one of Rajasthan's most magnificent forts. After lunch you can visit the City Palace or Jantar Mantar, an 18th century astronomical observation site. There's time to shop for jewellery in the chaotic markets, unwind at a spa or on the golf course, or take the unique opportunity to witness an elephant polo match – as bizarre as it sounds and yet oddly compelling.

### Heading home

Finally, there's one last night to spend on the train for the journey back to Delhi. On day four, you'll wake up in the capital city, refreshed and exhilarated, having tasted the past lives of royalty. It's time to depart the train after a quick breakfast, but there's plenty to absorb in the country's charismatic capital if you need one last afternoon of culture before catching the flight home.



Ranthambore National Park




# Maldives

It's the go-to place in the Indian Ocean for relaxation. And with its tropically terrific beaches and heart-stoppingly perfect resorts, the Maldives is a desert island paradise.

 **Flight time**  
5 hours 5 minutes

 **Door to door**  
Resort transfers from Male by boat or seaplane vary from 30 to 90 minutes; 10 minutes by boat from the airport into Male

 **When to go**  
December to April

Anyone who picks the Maldives for a short break not only has the joy of experiencing the sunny side of life, but also has every right to be smug as they walk into the office on a Sunday. This picture-perfect island nation in the Indian Ocean is made up of 26 atolls containing almost 2,000 coral islands, of which around 200 are populated. Of the populated islands, approximately half are resort islands offering a wide variety of options for holiday-makers, from the obscenely-priced to the more affordable.

You would be forgiven for thinking that videos and photos of the Maldives found in glossy magazines have been digitally remastered – because surely the ocean can't be that blue and the sand that golden? However, when your seaplane touches down

on your resort island you will quickly realise that this is paradise. As one of the world's best destinations, if not the best, for diving and snorkelling, there are few places on earth where you can walk from a stunning beach straight into the ocean and see a lively coral reef a few feet below you. Time seems to slow down in the Maldives and spending a few days in awe of the ocean, relaxing in a hammock over impossibly pristine beaches, or sipping cocktails and dining on all-inclusive seafood buffets can certainly make for a dream holiday.

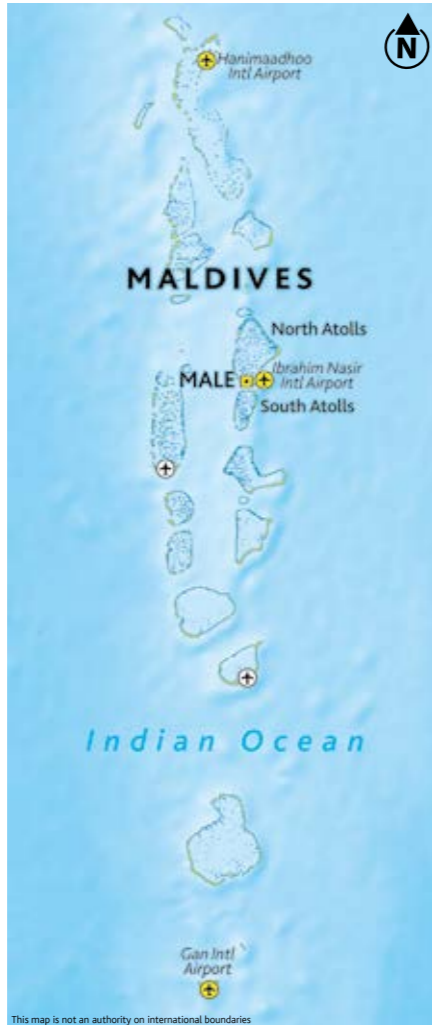
The Maldives is a place to get away from the rat race and discover a whole new world beneath the sea. While it comes with a price, it is one worth paying for a slice of heaven on earth.

## Dive in & explore

As the lowest country in the world, the Maldives is very much about the ocean on which its dream desert islands sit. With one of the richest marine diversities on the planet, the biggest draw is the diving and snorkelling. The view above sea level is pretty much blue skies, green trees and impossibly white sand (not that you'd complain) while the ocean reveals a whole new world of marine life in technicolour glory, from reef sharks to turtles, stingrays to a plethora of tropical fish. Whether you're PADI certified, want to be, or just fancy a spot of snorkelling, the Maldives offers one of the best options for underwater exploration.

## Maldives Essentials

Whether you are a party of two looking for an amorous adventure or a family of five, this awesome archipelago fits the bill.



### Getting there

Fly from Dubai or Abu Dhabi to Male airport with Emirates, Etihad or flydubai from Dhs.1,400 return. Resorts will arrange for seaplane or speedboat transfers from Male, adding the (often hefty) charge to your check-out bill.

### Visas

Visitors to the Maldives will be granted a 30-day tourist visa on arrival.

### Time

One hour ahead of the UAE.

### Climate

The Maldives has a tropical climate with average temperatures hovering around 30°C. Between January and March it is dry, although monsoons from the northeast can still bring rain. The chance of rain increases between May and November and humidity is higher too. However, this is also when resort prices are lower. March to October is the best time to visit for surfers, as this is when the swells are at their biggest.

### Language

Dhivehi; English is widely spoken.

### Currency

Maldivian Rufiyaa (MVR).  
100 MVR = Dhs.24

### Vaccinations

Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Typhoid.



### Great for... total escapism

Although the Maldives is only a few hours' flight from the UAE, you'll feel a million miles from anywhere, with the sophisticated skyscrapers and cosmopolitan chaos of home a distant memory. You can go to do nothing but lie by the pool or beach and perhaps visit the spa, or you can get active in the ocean with a pick 'n' mix of watersports.



## Maldives Highlights



Forget about island hopping. Aside from the occasional excursion, select a resort, dig your toes into the sand and relax.

## Island life

Islands vary in size, from the very small uninhabited islands which can disappear when a reef's current changes, to the bigger islands such as Male at 1.7 square kilometres. In the end, deciding which island to pick really depends upon your budget. If you want exclusivity, opt for one of the 100 or so resort islands; however, if you're working on a tighter budget then there are guesthouses on Male and some of the inhabited islands. Take into consideration, however, that while you may be able to bag a bargain on your flights and accommodation, you still need to set a fairly high budget for your food and drink. It isn't easy to travel between the islands, so choose carefully when picking your home away from home.



## Male

All international flights land in Hulhule, the airport island that is part of Male, the capital; visitors then take a connecting seaplane flight or speedboat from here to their chosen resort. In a country of around 275,000 people, the capital is home to two-thirds of the population, and the busy streets of Male are a world away from the serenity of the other islands. While Male is the largest of the islands, there is not much to see or do, although there are several hotels available if you land at night (seaplanes only fly during daylight hours). From the airport island, you can take a 10-minute boat ride to get to the main island of Male. If you do have a few hours spare, there is a traditional market on the northern side of the island selling local produce and souvenirs, and the Friday mosque is an interesting example of coral architecture.

## The Atolls

From Male you head north or south to one of the 26 atolls that make up the Maldives. Each individual atoll comprises a coral reef that surrounds a lagoon and is divided by deep channels. Within the atoll sphere resides a series of islands, each with its own animated coral reef where all manner of marine life have made their home. Each resort is a world in itself with activities and restaurants to keep you entertained. Depending on where you are staying, you may be able to enjoy excursions to some of the inhabited islands for cultural tours.

## Catch of the day

The Maldives offers bountiful fishing opportunities. Most resorts offer fishing trips and often you'll be able to barbecue your catch of the day on one of the uninhabited islands.

## Watersports

As 99% of the Maldives is made up of ocean it's not surprising that a large amount of time is spent in the water. In addition to the obvious snorkelling and diving, many resorts offer stand up paddleboarding, windsurfing, and waterskiing. All resorts have professional diving schools, with the option of house reef dives – so close to the shore that they can be explored by beginners as well as experts – or boat dives, which go into deeper waters for wreck dives. The Maldives' stunning coral reefs in shallow waters are just as fun to explore by snorkel though. Other trips include night dives, and snorkelling safaris with underwater cameras.

## Well-being

Thanks to its serene natural surroundings, the Maldives is the perfect location for total relaxation. You will notice that most resorts have "Spa" attached to their title and with good reason; taking time out to enjoy a relaxing treatment is a must, even when you're already in paradise.



Need a refreshing beach or pool-side drink? Try coconut water, straight from the sliced-open fruit.



## Maldives Places to stay



Kuramathi Island Resort

## Male

If you are staying in the capital for a night or two, there are a few luxury options and budget hotels that can be reached by car from the airport at Hulhule or by boat if on the island of Male. There are also several breathtaking resorts scattered across the North and South Male Atolls – just a short taxi (or speedboat) ride from the airport.

### Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa

This slice of luxury on a private island in the North Male Atoll is the perfect holiday spot for ocean lovers, hosting a range of watersports in its lagoon and boasting 40 dive sites nearby. It's also a great choice for a family holiday: kids will love the playground and daily activities at the Sheraton Adventure Club, while grown-ups enjoy some well-deserved chill-out time at the luxury Shine Spa for Sheraton.

[starwoodhotels.com](http://starwoodhotels.com).

### Taj Exotica Resort & Spa

Thanks to its handy location on the South Male Atoll, the Taj Exotica Resort & Spa is an excellent choice of hotel for those short on time, as it's just a 15-minute speedboat ride from the airport. This stunning island resort is surrounded by one of the largest lagoons in the Maldives, and whether you're looking for a romantic break or a family getaway, you're sure to enjoy the luxurious over-water villas, sparkling private plunge pools and infinite ocean views. [tajhotels.com](http://tajhotels.com)

### Traders Hotel

Located in Male, the Traders Hotel is a great stopover option and offers a chance to experience another side of island life. The rooftop pool bar is the perfect spot from which to watch the comings and goings of the city. You can dine on French and Japanese nibbles and sip fruity mocktails while taking in the view.

[shangri-la.com/traders](http://shangri-la.com/traders)

askexplorer.com



Taj Exotica Resort & Spa



Taj Exotica Resort & Spa



Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa



Remember that in the Maldives each island is home to just one resort – so choose yours carefully. Do your homework and think about what you want: a romantic short break or a memorable family getaway? Consider the size of your chosen destination: a bigger resort will feel livelier, but fewer villas will make for a more exclusive experience.

## Maldives Places to stay

### Family-friendly

On first impression, you may assume that the Maldives is a destination reserved for honeymooners and other couples in search of luxury and romance. However, there is a wide range of resorts offering fun for all the family, making it the perfect place to spend some quality time with the kids.

#### Constance Halaveli

While parents unwind, kids can search for hermit crabs and send balloon wishes high into the sky. Children aged 10 and over can also do a PADI scuba diving course, and children as young as five can have a diving experience of their own with SASY (Supplied Air Snorkelling for Youth). [halaveli.constancehotels.com](http://halaveli.constancehotels.com)



Kuramathi Island Resort



One & Only Reethi Rah



Kuramathi Island Resort

#### Tots & teens

More resorts in the Maldives are recognising the importance of catering for mini-holidaymakers, too. Some offer such features as spa treatments for kids and teens, while others such as the Niyama resort offer a 'kids eat and sleep for free' promotion during selected dates.

#### Kuramathi Island Resort

At the Bageecha Kids Club, there's a whole host of activities on offer for children, from nature walks to treasure hunts and marine life lessons. The latter is a great option before taking a family snorkelling trip. Best of all, you can opt for an all-inclusive package, and leave your worries (and wallet) behind during your stay. [kuramathi.com](http://kuramathi.com)

#### One & Only Maldives at Reethi Rah

Who says a family holiday has to sacrifice luxury? This resort is a good choice for families wanting a luxury hideaway and VIP treatment. This luxury resort in the North Male Atoll caters well for families of all ages, with its signature KidsOnly programmes for children aged four to 11 and teens aged 12 to 17. Supervised by fully-qualified counsellors, younger guests get to enjoy their own section of the resort with their own clubhouse and swimming pool.

[reethirah.oneandonlyresorts.com](http://reethirah.oneandonlyresorts.com)

#### Viceroy Maldives

The Viceroy's Generation V programme is available for kids aged four to 12 and focuses on educating children about the local culture and environment through fun activities including shell painting, kite making and snorkelling. The hotel also offers babysitting services, and the option of 24-hour in-villa dining to enjoy once the kids are asleep in bed. The deluxe beach villas come with a twin-sharing bedroom in addition to a master suite.

[viceroyhotelsandresorts.com](http://viceroyhotelsandresorts.com)



One & Only Reethi Rah

### Couples only

From newlyweds on their honeymoon to a husband and wife renewing their vows, or simply a couple in search of the ultimate romantic break, you cannot fail to be touched by the magic of the Maldives.

#### Anantara Kihavah

Whether you want to get married on the beach or on a yacht, in an underwater restaurant or diving in the ocean, the wedding packages here are out-of-this-world. For couples looking for extreme romance this resort offers private dining, couples' spa treatments and private pools.

[kihavah-maldives.anantara.com](http://kihavah-maldives.anantara.com)

#### Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

A unique experience at this six-star resort is the mini submarine perfect for couples to take a romantic 30-minute underwater cruise. Plus, you can renew your love in a ceremony on the beach or even underwater. A fantasy resort where everything you know is left far behind once you get off that seaplane. [conradmaldives.com](http://conradmaldives.com)

#### Huvafen Fushi

This astoundingly beautiful resort has all manner of memorable romantic experiences on offer, from underwater weddings and sunset cruises to low-key ceremonies on the powder-white beach. Be sure to take some time to unwind with a couples' treatment in the legendary LIME spa, home to the world's first underwater treatment rooms.

[huvafenfushi.peraquum.com](http://huvafenfushi.peraquum.com)

#### Soneva Fushi

This intimate resort is just perfect for love birds – it even touts its own Romantic Experience which includes private beach dinners, dolphin cruises, spa treatments, wine and chocolate tasting and night snorkelling for two. [soneva.com](http://soneva.com)



Huvafen Fushi

## Maldives Places to stay



### On a budget

The Maldives have always been well known as a notoriously pricey holiday destination (albeit one that's worth every single dirham). However, it is possible to enjoy a Maldives short break without breaking the bank – you just need to budget carefully and choose the right resort.

#### Asseyri Tourist Inn

Located on the inhabited island of Hanimaadhoo, this hotel offers a range of room types from singles to a private cottage perfect for families. While the resort is alcohol-free, the restaurants are still very good and the ocean of course remains just as mesmerising as any of the luxury resorts. The reef within a vast sand bank here is a great place to learn kitesurfing too. [asseyri.travel](http://asseyri.travel)



Keep costs down with an all-inclusive food and drink package. Make sure you try a few local delicacies. Seafood features heavily and the cuisine is strongly influenced by south Indian cooking, particularly Kerala; meals are typically hot, spicy, flavoured with coconut, and traditionally served with rice.

#### Fun Island Resort & Spa

A 45-minute speedboat ride from Male, this resort has 50 beach bungalows with private terraces and access to the beach itself. Dining is a little limited with just two restaurants, but there are plenty of activities to keep you busy throughout the day, including windsurfing, canoeing, snorkelling and island hopping. There's even a PADI accredited diving centre on site that organises lessons and excursions. [funislandmaldives.com](http://funislandmaldives.com)

#### Kuredu Resort

There are two resorts and four categories of rooms at this destination providing a lot of choice for guests, from the more affordable garden villas to the Jacuzzi beach villas as well as luxury pool villas and water villas. The stunning hotel boasts plenty of dining options and you can even boost your holiday budget by selecting one of the all-inclusive packages. [kuredu.com](http://kuredu.com)

#### Makunudu Island Resort

Just under an hour by speedboat from Male in the North Male Atoll, this resort has just 36 beach bungalows, offering a truly secluded desert island experience. This is a great choice for a few days away from it all, when your to-do list consists of nothing but sunbathing, getting pampered in the spa, or some leisurely snorkelling. And you don't need deep pockets to enjoy it either. [makunuduisland.com](http://makunuduisland.com)

### Guesthouses

For a really low budget, staying in a guesthouse on one of the inhabited islands instead of a luxury resort on a resort island should also do the trick. However, keep in mind that most of the hotels and guesthouses on inhabited islands don't serve alcohol. Elsewhere, Thulusdhoo is a popular island for budget surfing breaks, with guesthouses such as Surfers World Guest House being just a 30-minute speed boat ride away from Male. All rooms, though basic, have en suite bathrooms and there's the option of full board, breakfast only or bed only. Located near some excellent surfing spots – including Chickens, a tropical goofy footer's dream – this is ideal for surfers and backpackers.

### Surf's up

If your idea of a beach break involves catching the perfect wave, then you're in luck. Not only is March to October a cheap time to visit, it's also when the swells are at their best.



### Low season breaks

If you're set on staying at a luxury resort, such as the Kuramathi Island Resort or Niyama, visit during the off-peak seasons. The Maldives enjoys warmth all-year round, but during the low season (May to November) there is a higher chance of rain. However, the temperatures remain in the upper 30s and the significantly lower hotel rates (which sometimes drop to at least half of the peak season price) make it a great time to escape the UAE summer. If you're very clever and book in advance, the best time to go is on the cusp of high season. That way you can still enjoy a drier holiday but pay half of what the guests who stayed there just a couple of weeks before paid!



## Maldives Places to stay



## Sundowners

Of course, not everyone heads for the Maldives in search of a family holiday or romantic break. For some, the idyllic archipelago is a place to unwind and let their hair down in luxury restaurants and bars, against a backdrop of unreal beauty.

### Club Med Kanifinolhu

Club Med's private Maldives resort is the perfect holiday destination for those looking to enhance (and show off) their beach bodies, with an array of athletic activities on offer including aquagym, beach golf, soccer, kayaking, and more. Afterwards, take a trip to the luxury spa for a well-earned pampering session, then fill your evenings with tropical fruit-inspired cocktails and live music. [clubmed.co.uk](http://clubmed.co.uk)



### Niyama

Home to the world's first underwater nightclub Subsix, this unique resort in the Maldives is a party paradise. With international DJs, a rooftop bar offering laidback grooves, and the must-visit restaurant Edge – an overwater eatery accessible only by boat – as well as campfire dining, this is the ultimate in hedonistic holidaying. Recharge with the pampering NIYAMA Recovery treatment at the excellent LIME Spa. [niyama.peraquum.com](http://niyama.peraquum.com)

### Velassaru Maldives

Cocktails and Cuban tunes in Fen Bar's Havana night set the scene for this opulent island resort of indulgence, with its beach and water bungalows and villas as well as the 270msq Velassaru Water Suite. Don't forget to visit overwater eatery Teppanyaki for some of the freshest sushi you'll ever eat, or beachside restaurant Sand for alfresco dining with panoramic views of the Indian Ocean. [velassaru.com](http://velassaru.com)

### W Retreat & Spa Maldives

With its WET beach parties and DJ nights, this resort is perfect for party people looking to combine a luxury paradise island stay with great activities and energetic evening entertainment, including 15BELOW, the Maldives' only underground nightclub. The team of resident mixologists will make sure that you have an exotic creation in your hand for sundowners and beyond. [wretreatmaldives.com](http://wretreatmaldives.com)



# Love is in the air

Reignite the romance



**Ticket to paradise**  
Travelling to the resort involves seaplanes, speedboats and buggies, but your reward is a private paradise for two.

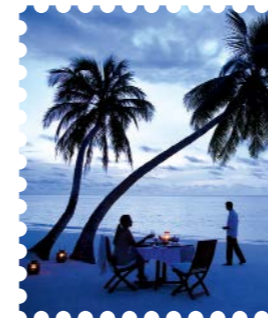
Couples wanting a secluded break with a romantic backdrop can stay in a stilted water villa at the Shangri-La.



What is it that makes the Maldives so synonymous with romance? For decades, this enchanting archipelago in the Indian Ocean has been shorthand for idyllic islands, unreal beauty and honeymoon bliss. You don't even need to be planning your honeymoon in order to make the most of this destination; the manageable flight time from the UAE means that it's just as good for a short romantic break as a once-in-a-lifetime trip.

There's nothing quite as romantic as feeling like you and your beloved are the only two people in the world – a sense of intimacy and seclusion that can easily be achieved if you know which Maldivian island to choose.

For a truly hidden gem, there are few places as romantic as Shangri-La's Villingili Resort & Spa ([shangri-la.com/maldives](http://shangri-la.com/maldives)). The journey to its intimate location on Gan Island in Addu Atoll involves an hour-long flight crossing shimmering aquamarine water and a scattering of islands, plus a 15-minute speedboat trip and, quite possibly, a buggy ride into the jungle to your hidden villa. But the travel time is more than worth it to arrive at your own personal paradise.



**Table for two**  
Shangri-La offers spectacular restaurant dining: gourmet cuisine plus gorgeous ocean views. Perhaps the most romantic option, however, is organising a private meal. You can have your dinner served in one of the tranquil spa pavilions, within your villa or on the beach under a palm tree.

## Island getaway

Bright turquoise waves lap gently at powder-soft sand as palm trees sway languidly in the ocean breeze. The beauty is spellbinding, and that's before you even get to your jaw-dropping luxury villa. You can opt for the Swiss Robinson Family-esque tree house hideaway, or a beach villa with private access to your own stretch of sand and sea. The archetypal Maldivian over-water villas on stilts are also available. Each romantic haven has its own unique luxurious touches, from private infinity pools to open air showers.

Privacy is key to the appeal of the Shangri-La resort. The island's uniquely dense vegetation has been incorporated into the hotel design to add to the romantic seclusion by screening you from the outside world. It feels as though you could spend your entire short break seeing no one but each other. However, if and when you do decide to drag yourself away from your villa, or indeed from the resort, there are plenty of things to see and do. Why not take a cycle tour of the island on the resort's 'his and hers' bikes? You'll discover your own secret coves and strolls that you won't find on any tourist map.

## Two's company

It wouldn't be a trip to the Maldives without exploring the world beneath the waves. The archipelago has some of the globe's best diving and snorkelling sites, and there are few outdoor activities quite as romantic as drifting blissfully on the surface of the ocean alongside your loved one. The resort has its own house reef, for just such an occasion.



The stunning CHI spa, tucked away between the jungle and the sea, offers some wonderfully relaxing couples' treatments, including a cowrie shell massage that uses the large, smooth shells to soothe tired muscles and melt your cares away.

