

— Cora Cora —

WHERE FREEDOM AND LUXURY ENTWINE



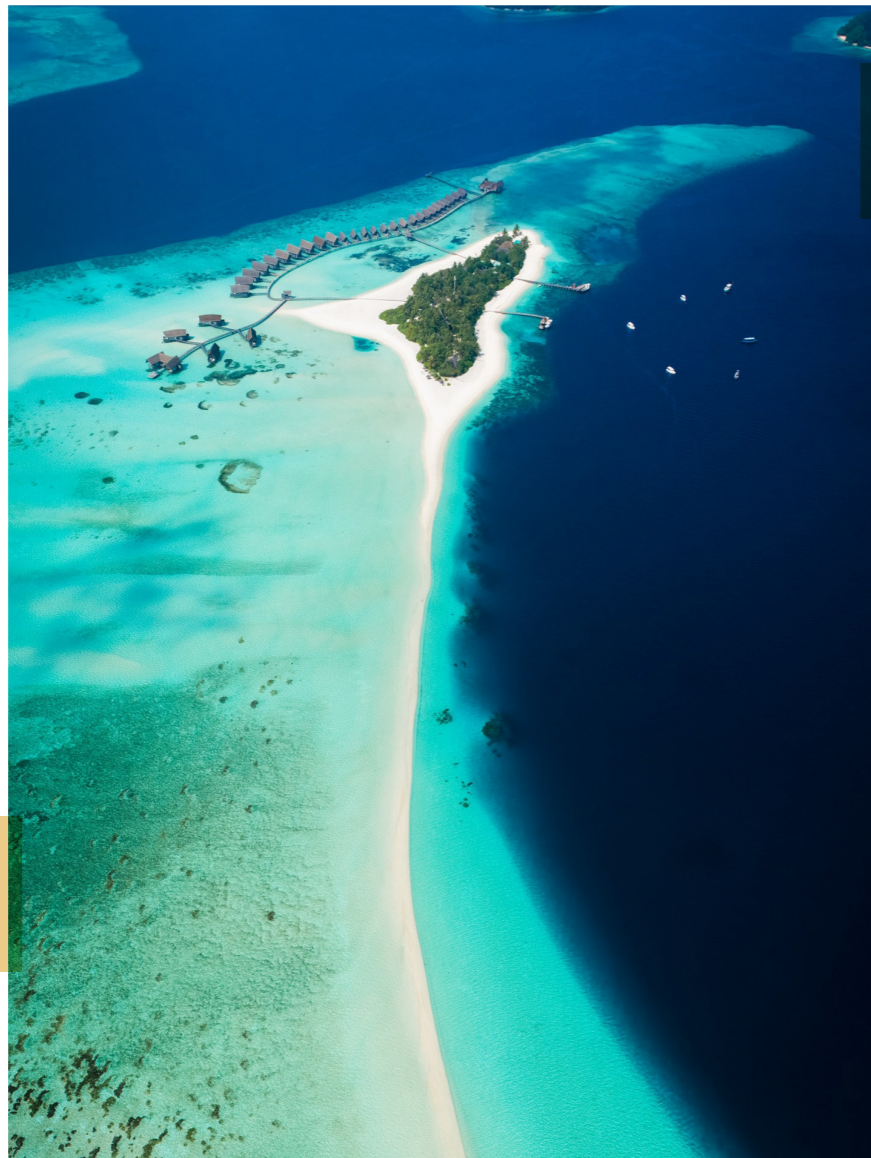
The Maldives: two words that have you daydreaming of paradise in an instant. A bucket-list destination that oozes luxury and relaxation. **VANESSA GAINFORD** explores the idyllic Cora Cora resort

As someone who loves to be sunbathing on the beach with a book but only for a day or two before I find the need to explore, I was ecstatic to be going to the Maldives – yet part of me was a little concerned about being ‘stuck’ on one small island for a whole week. However, Cora Cora proved in an instant that I had nothing to worry about, in any way.

Once arriving in Male the Maldives’ experience began, greeted by the only Maldivian all-female airport team, and escorted via a five-minute minibus to the seaplane terminal. A 45-minute seaplane journey with an aerial view of the Indian ocean and different Atolls is a sight to behold.

From the moment you step foot on

the island Cora Cora promises to be unlike any other Maldivian resort. With the tagline, its freedom time, Cora Cora offers a new form of luxury to guests. Compared to our usual level of luxury, Cora Cora isn’t what we’re used to. However, the resort offers a different type of luxury, freedom. After a global pandemic, freedom is what we are all yearning for. Cora Cora’s main concept being freedom makes it the most luxurious place of all. As our view on luxury has shifted, yes, we still want luxurious places, but we also want to escape, and after being restricted for so long we want to live life on our own accord. Unlike many Maldivian getaways, Cora Cora has a relaxed yet fun vibe and the resort embraces island life, so much so that at the end of our trip having to wear shoes was a reality shock.



Situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean in the Raa Atoll on a natural lagoon just 750 metres long and 500 metres wide is Maamigili Island - home to Cora Cora. The décor and colour palette alone showcases the vibe of the resort; a vibrant and colourful dose of escapism, in idyllic contrast to the blue skies, white sand, and turquoise waters.

Upon arrival you are designated a 'Freedom Coach' and asked to download the Cora Cora App. The App is ideal for those who like to control their own time, to make excursion, water sports, spa, salon, and restaurant bookings along with looking at activity schedules. If you're happy for someone to take over then

decide what you would like to do and leave it to your Freedom Coach to create a bespoke itinerary. The idea of a Freedom Coach is to take all stress away from you and in my case, everything from reservations to PCR tests and broken suitcases were handled on my behalf without me even having to think about it. This was just the start of experiencing true freedom.

THE FOOD AT CORA CORA

The premium all-inclusive concept means you can enjoy all the food and drink you like at any time of the day. The food at Cora Cora is most definitely a highlight, as Head Chef Muath Abu Diab oversees the five

restaurants. Acquapazza, the resort's Italian, is home to an Italian chef who has only cooked pizza for the last 15 years - and it's the best pizza you will ever have. Acquapazza is also the place to go for pre-dinner drinks or after-dinner entertainment with the resort's in-house violinists and DJ.

Tazaa has an expansive menu and has its very own 'curry master' who specialises in creating 50 curries ranging from Indian to Maldivian. Two restaurants that require advance reservations are, Teien, a Japanese restaurant that offers an array of dishes and even vegan sushi, and Ginger Moon, where the cuisine is inspired by Asian street food. The culinary team make every dish unforgettable, as they cater to a range of dietary requirements; opt for vegan meals, refined sugar-free treats, or tee-total drinks.

For a more secluded and romantic dinner setting, book dinner in a cabana on the beach or even 'in' the beach, where a table is carved into the sand. With a menu curated especially for the occasion, a private dinner makes the perfect experience for a special occasion, or even to just enjoy each other's company, the sea breeze, and the night sky lit by candles alone.

One thing to note is that room service to your villa is non-existent unless you opt for a romantic floating breakfast. Why isn't room service an option? After being isolated for so long, Cora Cora believes interaction is essential, and eating out is what dreams are made of. However, if you fancy eating in your robe and slippers as you watch the sunset, or having lunch as you lounge by your pool, then you can pop to My Coffee, the resort's 24-hour coffee shop. Place your order from the 'food to go' menu and stroll barefoot back to your villa with your food in hand.

VILLAS AT CORA CORA

Accommodation on the island comes in the form of villas - 100 of them - ranging from beach villas and overwater villas to a two-storey family villa complete with four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a private pool, and a slide for easy-yet-fun access to the ocean. All villas are equipped



with open-air bathroom, complete with hammock hanging over the ocean, his and hers vanities, eco-friendly locally made toiletries, bathrobes, slippers, Cora Cora branded flip-flop, beach bags, a fully stocked minibar, a king-sized bed, most also have a private pool and overwater villas have steps down to the ocean. The artwork on the outside and in the inside of the villas is also all local and, if you're lucky, a wander down the beach by the main reception can lead you to an art class with the very artist!

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

With a private pool and ocean access, the idea of leaving your villa may seem futile, yet this tiny island has a lot to offer. If you're searching for bliss then head to the Moshka Spa, where a tranquil reception greets you with open doors leading to the beach and overwater huts where you can indulge in an array of treatments; massages, facials, and beauty treatments

to bespoke packages tailored to focus on your area of concern.

The resort proudly celebrates the culture and heritage of the Maldives with an on-site museum and heritage site. The island is home to two extremely rare ritual baths from pre-Islamic times, along with an array of artefacts from throughout the ages - a haven for history lovers. On-site archaeologist Umair Badheeu is happy to talk through any item of interest and even hosts fun excavation sessions for children.

There are other ways to explore paradise further. A private jet-ski tour around the Atoll, or a sunset cruise around the island onboard a traditional Maldivian Dhoni allows you to marvel at the resort and its surroundings from every angle.

A day trip to 'Ghost Island' means you can sail the ocean in the hopes of spotting a dolphin before disembarking on Kandholhudhoo, an island that was devastated by the 2004 boxing day

tsunami and is definitely worth visiting to understand the life of Maldivians and their emphasis on using every bit of their resources.

A short 15-minute speedboat trip can take you to a private sandbank where the team leave you to while away the hours in the sunshine in your own private slice of paradise, before coming back to take you deep-sea snorkelling.

Fun on the island itself is easy to find - just head to the beach hut and opt for a variety of watersports, from paddle boarding and glass-bottom canoes to flyboard lessons, or even just a relaxed snorkel in the home coral reef just metres from the beach. You'll never be bored.

However you choose to spend your time at Cora Cora, you'll leave with lasting memories, feeling rejuvenated, upset about the return of reality and with food cravings that won't be satisfied until you return. ■

