COURTESY ANANTARA

Island-hopping in the Maldives

The warm turquoise waters here are so clear that they almost seem unreal.

Contemplating the sea at Anantara Dhigu.
JANNA GRABER

▲ Anantara Dhigu resort has 110 villas and suites on the South Male Atoll.

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By Janna Graber

The 1,190 tiny islands that make up the Maldives are not the easiest place to reach. They stretch across a remote section of the Indian Ocean like a delicate string of pearls, and you have to look closely on a map to see them. Yet many travellers are willing to make the journey—and for good reason.

The warm turquoise waters here are so clear that they almost seem unreal. You can stand on a pier and see starfish and schools of fish swirling more than 30 feet below. The sand is so white that it reflects in the water, creating the kind of beach most of us dream of.

For many, the Maldives is synonymous with island luxury. Each resort is on its own island, responsible for providing its own power, water, food supplies, and other resources. The Maldives has more than 100 resort islands; my friends and I visited four of them, each one quite different from the other.

Baros:
Adults-only romantic resort
Our first stop was Baros, a luxury resort about 25 minutes by speedboat from the capital of Malé. An adults-only destination, Baros is popular with honeymooners. One highlight is a private dinner for two served at sunset on The Sandbank, a tiny slip of sand in the middle of the crystal sea.

Baros has a private, intimate feel, with 45 beachside and 30 overwater villas. Behind my villa I found a private yard with a plunge pool, a shaded wooden veranda deck with a canopied daybed, and my own private section of the beach. There wasn't a soul in sight when I stretched out there later in the day on a lounge chair. A large heron joined me, standing just a few feet away as I was lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves.

Adaaran Prestige Vadoo:
All-inclusive
Our next stop, Adaaran Prestige Vadoo, has a completely different feel. The all-inclusive resort is popular with young couples and families, and the island is busy with activities—beach volleyball, snorkelers, and couples out on jet skis. Water skiing, tube rides, and even a whale submarine excursion are also available.

Adaaran Prestige Vadoo has 50 water villas, each with its own plunge pool and private deck. The villas sit above turquoise waters, with unrestricted access to the Indian Ocean. Six of the villas follow traditional Japanese design. My villa had a see-through floor section that allowed me to see the clear seas below.

Anantara Dhigu:
For families and couples
Anantara Dhigu welcomes guests of all ages, and even has a kids' club for those age 11 and under. The resort has 110 villas and suites. My overwater villa had large rooms and a private wooden deck with stairs leading down to the sea. But it's the stand-alone tub surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the water that made me want to jump for joy. As I looked out, I spotted a huge stingray in the turquoise ocean below.

Dining at Anantara is a highlight, and there are more restaurants than we could sample during our stay, from Japanese to Italian to seafood. One afternoon, my friends and I took a Maldivian cooking class. The chefs provided fun and helpful instruction, and then we got to eat what we made.

With its thatched roof and tranquil setting over the aquamarine sea, the spa at Anantara is another highlight. After a Floral Foot Ritual and an hour of Thai massage, I was so relaxed that I dozed off.

AaaVeee:
Nature and diving
We arrived by seaplane at AaaVeee, one of the newest resorts in the Maldives. Committed to being environmentally friendly, the island resort makes the most of its native trees and shoreline, with sand pathways and even a sand floor in the open-air restaurant. Our villas had wood floors and furnishings crafted from coconut trees on the island.

AaaVeee is a well-suited for divers and snorkelers. The island has a healthy reef and a well-outfitted dive shop. Diving is available right from the beach. Within minutes of swimming from shore, our dive group reached an extensive reef where we saw wide fan coral, huge starfish, and large schools of fish.

Later in the evening, we took a boat onto those same tranquil waters. The islands have no light pollution, so I could see thousands of stars twinkling in the night sky. Awed by the scene, I lay back on the deck and watched Mother Nature's grand display the whole way back.

IF YOU GO

Getting to the Maldives
International flights arrive at Malé's Abrahim Nasir International airport. There are direct flights to Malé from Dubai and many European and Asian cities. Coming from the United States, I flew with Emirates, connecting from Toronto to Dubai to Maldives.

Getting around in the Maldives
After flying to Malé, you'll take a boat, domestic flight, or seaplane to your resort, depending on how far it is. If you go by seaplane, be aware that seaplanes only operate in daylight hours. Seaplanes usually land at a floating platform near the island, and then guests are transferred by boat to shore. Resorts located closer to Malé use boats for transfer.

More information:
VisitMaldives.com

COURTESY BAROS

A villa at Baros.

View from the tranquil Baros resort on the North Male Atoll.

JANNA GRABER

Open air bar at AaaVeee.