

FIND JOY IN THE JOALI MALDIVES

Searching for a place to escape to after the lockdown is lifted? Is your pent-up wanderlust getting the better of you? Just a 45-minute seaplane flight from Male and you could find yourself immersed in a luxurious art-inspired island resort

BY ONG CHIN HUAT

Where on earth would anyone visit if the lockdown were lifted? Would it be somewhere cool or somewhere hot? A city break or a remote location? An exotic destination or a familiar place? All those days and weeks spent cooped up at home must have ignited the burning desire for travel again. Your living room may be your sanctuary but those four walls which surround you do get tiresome after a while.

While heaven on earth might be a tad too lofty to aspire to at this moment, the Joali Maldives comes pretty close. Located on the Instagram-worthy Muravandhoo Island in northern Maldives in the remote Raa Atoll, the Joali reopened on the 1st of August, just a fortnight after the Maldives lifted all travel restrictions and welcomed back international tourists on the 15th of July.

Needless to say, the management of this five-star resort adheres to strict WHO-approved health and safety regulations to put anyone who visits at complete ease. According to Enver Arslan the Resort Director of Joali, personal protective equipment and products are used in all the resort's outlets while strict hygienic standards are adhered to. "For instance in our villas, we have iPads which lets you control the electronics such the TV, air-con, the curtains, the music and sound system as well as being able to access the in-villa dining menu and thus reducing exposure to the common touch points," he explains.

Comprising 73 dreamy beach and over-water villas with each containing one to four bedrooms has double-volume ceilings, private pools and a soothing colour-palette which all exudes luxury and refinement. A personal "Jadugar" which means magician in the local lingo is on hand to cater to your every need. Choose the beach villas if access to fine, soft and white powdery sand is what you want to feel between your toes while the over-water villas has the ocean right under you and jumping in the turquoise-hued waters every morning is what tickles your fancy.

As an immersive art resort, works of art by notable contemporary artists are dotted around the resort, some even on the ocean bed. Follow Joali's Art Map to discover contemporary and experiential artworks by artists such as Zemer Peled, Nacho Carbonell and Reinaldo Sanguino. The eye-catching arrival jetty, a work of art in itself resembles the ripples of fins of a manta ray while going scuba-diving to view the underwater coral



The eye-catching arrival jetty



Jumping into the clear turquoise water from the over-water villas is pure magic

reef sculpture by American artist Mischa Kahn is a novel way to view art.

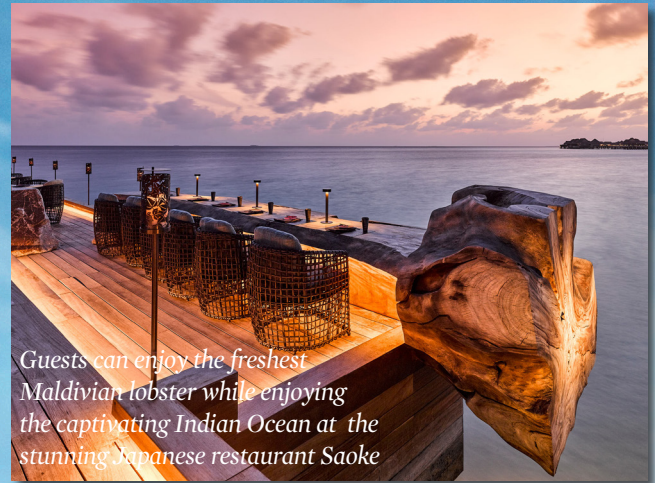
And apart from scuba-diving or snorkelling, there are a myriad of activities to indulge in while cocooned on this paradisiacal island. From water sports like parasailing and wakeboarding to excursions on a dhoni (a traditional Maldivian sailing vessel) to visit a neighbouring island or lagoon, the real concern would be whether you could fit it all into your schedule and also squeeze in some downtime to just chill by the pool.

One activity not to miss is the sunrise yoga class conducted in the stunning yoga pavilion located on the water. There's nothing quite like doing a sun salutation while the early morning sun rises right in front of you on the distant horizon. With the Joali Spa located just a few steps away, a massage and facial following your yoga class would be the ideal way to start your day.

Food is another plus point at Joali. Needless to say, being located in the middle of the Indian Ocean does have its advantages. The freshest seafood like Maldivian lobster features prominently on their menu while their stunning Japanese restaurant Saoke (one of four restaurants located in the resort) is located on the water and offers the most delectable sushi and sashimi. Designed by acclaimed Japanese architect Noriyoshi Muramatsu, this temple of culinary delights is an architectural marvel on its own with its dramatic entrance flanked by columns of sake and spirits and its effective use of timber.

An experiential dinner worth writing home about is inside the Manta Tree House designed by South African artist Porky Hefer. Located high above the ground with commanding views of the sea, it's the ideal spot to sip a sundowner while watching the sun set or to propose to the love of your life. Being the very first art-immersive resort in the Maldives, Joali also offers workshops and events centred on art in their exclusive art studio which nurtures local artists as well as host visiting ones who create interactive art projects for Joali's guests to enjoy.

And just in case you think Joali is all fun and frivolity (yes, it is!) they also have a responsible side when it comes to sustainability. Over 1,000 trees were preserved during the construction of the resort and it continues today with the Joali Reef Restoration Programme which endeavours to rehabilitate and recover coral reefs devastated from the coral bleaching event back in 2016 by growing corals in a nursery before they are transplanted back into the reefs around Joali.



Guests can enjoy the freshest Maldivian lobster while enjoying the captivating Indian Ocean at the stunning Japanese restaurant Saoke



Beach villa with pool terrace



Heron chair by Porky Hefer