

A slice of nature's best

As another academic year starts, we begin to plan our festive season getaways as our minds drift to Maldivian crystal blue waters and soft sandy shores, where local produce receives a gourmet touch at Anantara Dhigu Maldives. **By Sophie McCarrick**



while each of the islands are accessible around the clock via pontoon boats that ferry guests from A to B every five-minutes (they're that close that you could technically swim), some guests opt to book their stay across all three islands, as each resort comes with its own unique offering. Three holidays in one? Yes, please!

Dining at Anantara Dhigu

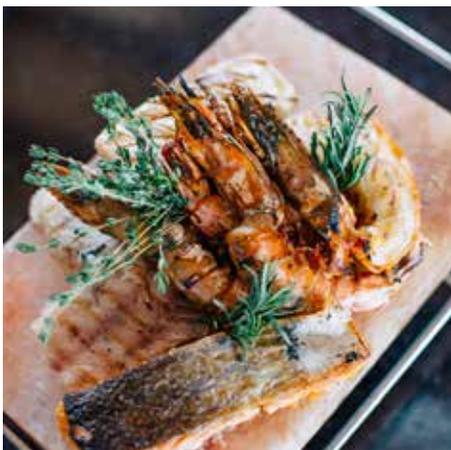
Exclusive luxury aside, the Maldives oozes an unbeatable natural simplicity. Think barefoot strolls through soft sand under a starlit sky, afternoons spent reading sheltered below vibrantly green palms that sway to their own laid-back rhythm, and best of all, dining experiences that showcase native Maldivian ingredients.

“Don't think fine dining when it comes to Maldivian cuisine. Think down to earth, hearty and wholesome cooking, inspired by local ingredients and family traditions,” says Claudiu Covrig, cluster director of food and beverage for Anantara Dhigu Resort, Anantara Veli Resort and Naladhu Maldives. “It can be quite spicy because of the Maldivian chilli, but in our

Pure white sands, clear turquoise waters, azure cloudless skies, luscious greens and over-water villas – the dreamlike Maldives speaks for itself through postcard-perfect imagery, sans Photoshop. Paired with world-class dining, schools of tropical fish to swim with and colourful coral to see, it comes as no surprise that this destination is consistently one of the world's most frequented and popular honeymoon destinations.

Abundant with five-star islands, I wonder as we depart from Male International Airport by speedboat to the resort – what makes a unique Maldives holiday experience?

The answer? Look to Anantara Dhigu Maldives, located a quick 35-minute boat ride from the airport in Dhigufinolhu, South Male Atoll. The island is closely neighboured by Anantara Veli (an adult only resort) and Nalhadu Maldives (the lagoon's most exclusive island resort), and



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experience at the resort, those who try it, absolutely love it – it can be quite additive actually,” he adds.

With shipments arriving to Dhigu island on a weekly basis, stocked with premium ingredients from all over the world – such as prime grade beef from Australia and lamb from Wales – Anantara strives to source as much as possible from the local islands and waters. As a tropical nation made up of 26 atolls, comprising 1,200 tiny islands in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is plentiful with fish and seafood options. Freshly caught

yellowfin tuna, lobster and crabs are some of the favourites at Dhigu, sourced locally by the island’s dedicated fishermen. The land offers staple fruits that burst in flavour, like mangoes, bananas, watermelon and coconut, which is largely used for its milk in curries and desserts.

On Dhigu island, there’s a ‘Chef’s Garden’, where fresh vegetables and herbs grow. “There’s things like Maldivian rocket in his garden. We label it as Maldivian, as it boasts a slightly different texture than usual rocket – this is down to the sand in

the local soil,” explains Claudiu.

During a cooking class with the resort’s head chef Mo, I learn there’s more to the local cuisine than originally anticipated. He explains that through centuries of trade with the Indian sub-continent, Africa, Arabia and the Far East, local palates were enriched through the use of interesting spice and herb blends



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brought in from neighbouring continents. The result? A largely over-looked cuisine that marries subliminal flavours and great nutritional benefits (*recipes from chef Mo’s class are available overleaf*). The food is truly delicious – full-bodied in flavour, satisfying in texture and truly does leave you wanting more.

“For guests wanting to enjoy local flavours, we have a Maldivian-themed evening each week, the Spice Spoons

cooking class where participants can sample and discover a range of local ingredients, as well as ‘catch and cook’ fishing trips,” Claudiu reveals.

He adds that “despite being a remote island, F&B operations here are up-to-date with global culinary trends, ensuring that whether guests want to enjoy local cuisine or international, Anantara Dhigu is able to cater to their needs. We consider the wide geo-mix of our visitors, so that all special

holidays are celebrated here – from Christmas and Easter, to Eid and Ramadan, we cater to all occasions.”

Across the three resorts, there’s an array of dining options including the likes of Fushi Café, which serves a full breakfast buffet complete with live cooking stations, plus Aqua or Dhoni poolside outlets for lunch, snacks throughout the day, or evening drinks (sundowners are a must at both!). Next there’s ‘Sea. Fire. Salt’, a predominantly a grill-led restaurant that also serves a crossroads of cuisines. The best part about dining here – stunning views aside – is the ‘Salt Guru’, who presents a wide-range of salts tableside to pair with your beef, fish or seafood. Above, you’ll find a taste of Italy at Terrazzo.

As a Thai brand, Anantara prides itself on offering the best Thai food available in the atoll – and it does just that. Head to Baan Huraa for a dining experience that immerses you in Thai hospitality, charm and culinary splendour – must try dishes include the tom yam soup (a spicy and sour soup with prawns) and gai pad med mamuang (stir-fried chicken with cashew nuts). Also on the list is Origami, the Japanese restaurant on Veli island that serves sizzling

Getting there

Emirates Airlines (emirates.ae), FlyDubai (flydubai.com) and Etihad (etihad.com) have two flights daily flying from the UAE into the Maldivian capital of Malé. Ticket prices start from around US\$800 (around Dhs3,000) for economy, and US\$2,000

(around Dhs8,000) for business class. Please note that these figures are priced based on travel during mid to high season. Anantara will arrange speedboat transfers to and from the airport to the island, at an additional cost.



Teppanyaki, plus a gorgeous selection of sushi and sashimi.

To make things that extra bit special, Dining by Design is the way to go. "It's our signature and exclusive private dining option. Expect tailor made menus, romance, a personal chef, a perfect location. Everything from the menu to the location, is bespoke to the guests' requirement," says Claudiu. The occasion promises to be a special one, with staff going above and beyond to

ensure the set-up, F&B, atmosphere and service is second to none.

Adventure and relaxation

Sunrise or sunset is the main question when deciding on your villa type at Anantara Dhigu Maldives. Nestled amidst jungle-like settings on each side of the island, the beach villas allow for either sunrise, or sunset viewing. Alternatively, the over water suites, or two-bedroom pool villas, are luxurious options too. All villas boast lavish, tropical interiors, privacy and some with personal swimming pools, the rooms here don't disappoint – and make it very easy to enjoy a self-contained holiday with heaps of peace and serenity.

When you're done with relaxing beach- or pool-side, there's a range of unique experiences to be had. Head out on a dolphin-spotting excursion, fishing trip, or go snorkeling with wild dolphins, whale sharks, beautifully

coloured fish, eagle rays, manta rays, turtles and more – the experience is breathtaking, so don't forget to bring the GoPro along. Be sure to pick up your snorkeling kit from the Dive Center – you never know what you'll see at beaches surrounding the resort. Afterwards, relax at the Anantara Spa – with the sound of calming waves surrounding you, you're sure to leave floating on air.

Whatever your idea of paradise may be, I'm confident you're certain to discover it – and more, at the family-friendly, magical dream-like resort of Anantara Dhigu Maldives.

Stay

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Website: anantara.com/maldives/

TRY RECIPES FROM THE SPICE SPOONS COOKING CLASS AT HOME!



ANBU RIHA

Ripe mango curry

All the hallmarks of Maldivian cuisine come together in this deliciously fresh and fruity curry dish. While mangos and coconuts grow in abundance amongst the atolls and tuna fish thrive in its waters it's only natural they'd come together in a mouthwatering dish.

You can choose between smoked tuna and tuna chips but the mangos must be ripe and cooked until soft. The coconut milk will permeate the fruit texture, filling the dish with aromas of garam masala and fresh seafood.

SERVES 1

3 ripe mangos, peeled and sliced
2 big onions, sliced
12 curry leaves
1 pandan leaf, cut into 2 inch strips
2 garlic cloves, chopped
30g ginger
Maldives chilli (Githeyomirus), cut into 2 inch strips, to taste
4 tbsp chicken curry powder
2 tbsp roasted curry powder
½ tsp Lonumirus curry powder or chilli powder
1 tsp garam masala powder
2 tbsp tomato paste
85g tuna chips or smoked tuna
½ cup thick coconut milk
1½ cup water
1/3 cup vegetable oil
50g sugar
Salt, to taste

1 Heat the oil in a saucepan; add onion, curry leaves, pandan leaves, ginger, garlic and chillies, then sauté until the onions turn light brown.

2 Add all the curry powder and tomato paste and roast until oil separates from the onions, then add the mangos, tuna chips and water.

3 Cook until the mangos become soft. Add the coconut milk and sugar, cook for another five minutes.

4 Season with salt and serve with rice.

KANNELI MAS RIHA

Maldivian tuna curry

Creamy and delicious, this beautifully simple dish is very representative of Maldivian cuisine. Featuring locally sourced coconut and tuna fish the curry is brought to life with herbs and spices from the Indian sub-continent including curry leaves and cumin powder.

The yellow fin tuna is diced and cooked over a low heat with a mixture of fried onions and curry spices to which fish stock is added. The curry is left to simmer for a while and coconut milk is added towards the end of the cooking process. 'Mas riha' is commonly eaten with steamed white rice, but when taken for breakfast it is served with roshi flatbread and enjoyed with jasmine tea.

SERVES 1

160g yellow fin tuna
5g onions
3g garlic
3g ginger
5g fish curry powder
1g curry leaves
1g cumin powder
100ml coconut milk
50ml fish stock
1 lime
Salt and pepper, to taste
Corn oil, as required

1 Heat the corn oil in a pan.

2 Sauté the diced garlic, onion and ginger with the curry powder, cumin powder and tuna.

3 Add some of the fish stock and coconut milk and simmer gently with the curry leaves.

4 Cook it well and add the rest of the coconut milk and fish stock and boil for a while.

5 Add the seasonings and lime juice to taste.

6 Serve with steamed rice.



**HANAA KURI GILYULHU MAS****Green job fish fillet with fenfolhi noodles**

The unusually named 'green job fish' is a species of snapper native to the Indian Ocean. In days of old, the local Maldivians would have easily speared the job fish and conjured up a dozen ways of preparing it.

One of the most enduring methods is to infuse the diced flesh in garlic, ginger, cumin powder and curry leaves before adding coconut milk and allowing it to simmer for a few minutes only.

This dish can be enjoyed with rice or roshi – a Maldivian flatbread similar to the Indian chapatti. However, for something more unique and evocative of the Maldives, try your hand at making Fenfolhi – a type of noodle consisting of flour, eggs, coconut milk and salt.

Simply mix the ingredients together, make a thin crepe in a non-stick frying pan and cut into thin strips.

FOR THE FENFOLHI

200g flour
2 eggs
150ml coconut milk
Salt, to taste

- 1 Mix together to make a batter of flour, egg, coconut milk and salt. Leave aside.
- 2 In a non-stick frying pan, make a thin crepe out of the above mixture.
- 3 Roll the crepe and cut into strips.

FOR THE HANAA KURI GIYULHU

200g green job fish
50g onions
15g garlic
2g curry leaves
1g Maldivian chilli
15g ginger
2 tsp fish curry powder
½ tsp turmeric powder
½ tsp cumin powder
100ml coconut milk
1 lime

- 1 Mix together garlic, ginger, cumin powder and curry leaves to make a paste.
- 2 Cut the green job fish into 3cm cubes.
- 3 Pan fry the onion, once golden brown, add the prepared paste plus the fish curry and turmeric powder and stir on a low heat.
- 4 Add the green job dish and cook for 4 to 5 minutes on a low heat. Add coconut milk and allow to simmer.
- 5 Season with salt, pepper and lime juice. Serve with the noodles.