

TRAVEL + LEISURE

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WHERE
TO GO
in
2017

THE MALDIVES
CULTURAL KANAZAWA
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CHECKING IN

Maldives Multiplication

So many villas, so little time.

The islands have reached beyond the honeymoon market and are seeing the next generation of overwater bungalows cater to a wicer variety of niche interests like surfing and yoga. A staggering 23 new hotels opened in 2016 and about a dozen more will open in 2017. **Baglioni Hotels** (baglionihotels.com; doubles from US\$1,100) acquired a private island named Maagau, part of the Dhaalu Atoll, a 30-minute sea plane ride from Malé. It will be home to a brand-new resort to be completed this summer, composed of above-sea villas, and three restaurants. **Soneva Jani** (soneva.com; villas from US\$3,085) is a new 25-villa family-friendly resort set within its own private six-kilometer-long lagoon, which opened in late 2016. Its modernist timber architecture and bedrooms with retractable roofs are raising the bar for bungalow design. Another newcomer is the **Four Seasons Voavah Baa Atoll** (fourseasons.com; rates not yet available), which will be the world's only private resort located entirely within a UNESCO biosphere. And those who can't bear to leave the water will appreciate **Hurawalhi** (hurawalhi.com; tasting menu at 5.8 Undersea Restaurant US\$280), the world's largest subsea restaurant where you can dine on the very fish that swim past you. Getting to the Maldives will be easier too: this year **Costa Cruises** (costacruise.com; rates not yet available) is launching a cruise with stops in the Maldives, and Malé International Airport's US\$450-million refurb includes a new runway to accommodate more passengers. If all that weren't enough, UNESCO has been working with Maldives officials to make the entire archipelago a Biosphere Reserve by the end of this year. The plan includes a massive UN-funded clean water project that will start on Funadhoo and expand to at least 48 other remote islands, helping the Maldives become less wasteful and more self-sufficient. —ADAM H. GRAHAM



Voavah Baa Atoll, soon home to a Four Seasons.



Cliff pool villa lounge, Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar.

HISTORY LESSON

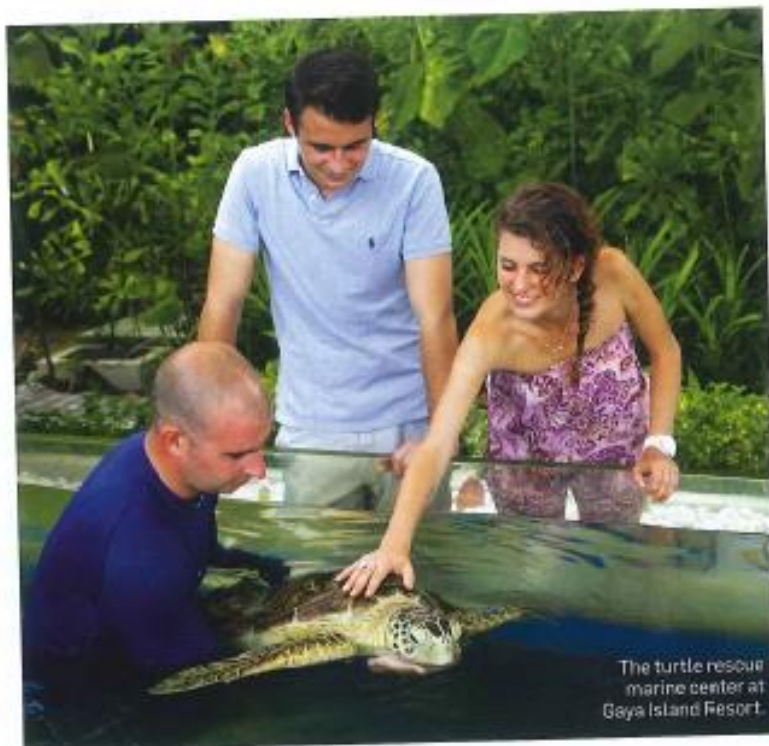
Oman of My Dreams

The Arabian peninsula's best-kept secret is on an upscale swing.

You'd be forgiven for wondering how a cradle of civilization and a major intersection of global trade routes has managed to stay off the tourism radar for so long. Oman, with its rich history exemplified by the 10,000-year-old city of Al Wathih and its unrivaled scenery that ranges from the limestone Al Hajar mountains to a 3,000-kilometer coastline, has big draws for every type of traveler. Trek windswept deserts, spot rambunctious dolphins in the gulf, visit dazzling mosques, stay in charming Bedouin towns. Even capital city Muscat, famed for its souks and seafood, boasts an incredibly diverse terrain—not to mention a laid-back, liveable scene that's less over-the-top than neighboring Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

No, the wealth hasn't run rampant in this sultanate, but they still know how to do luxury right. Intrepid brands the likes of Six Senses, The Chedi and Alila long have had covetable outposts in Oman, and the 30-tent, Arabian fantasy Desert Nights Camp has been on our bucket list for ages. Last year brought the opening of the first five-star on the south coast, **Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara** (salalah.anantara.com; doubles from US\$395), and, on the curving rim of a canyon, the **Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar** (jabal-akhdar.anantara.com; doubles from US\$638), the highest-altitude resort in the Middle East. A Jumeirah is scheduled to open near Muscat later in 2017. Now's the time to avail yourself of that legendary Omani hospitality. —JENNINE LEE-ST. JOHN

At six, Goode was given a pet Greek tortoise, thus clinching his love for chelonians



The turtle rescue marine center at Gaya Island Resort.

Conservation work means lots of time on the road, putting up with extreme conditions and surviving run-ins with poachers. "Traveling in this way is often much more interesting," Goode says. "You see parts of a country you'd never experience otherwise." He flies every two weeks: to New Orleans for a turtle conference, to Southeast Asia to film a documentary about the wildlife trade, to South Africa to visit some newly acquired hecatarge.

One of his most recent trips was to Mexico, where the conservancy had purchased a parcel of land in Sonora to protect a recently identified species, *Gopherus evgodei*, now commonly known as Goode's thornscrub tortoise. The journey had involved massive thunderstorms, a flooded tent, chigger bites and stomach trouble, but Goode had no complaints. "It's incredibly exciting and rewarding to travel with a mission and be able to do something positive for these countries. I feel very privileged."

HELP A HATCHLING

THREE RESORTS THAT DON'T MIND SHELLING OUT TO KEEP OUR FLIPPED FRIENDS AFLOAT.

+ Le Meridien Bora Bora The Bora Bora Turtle Center, located in the heart of Le Meridien resort, came into existence after a guest brought in an injured sea turtle from the surrounding lagoon and left it for hotel staff to take care of. Since then, more than 500 turtles have been reintroduced to the ocean, and thanks to their artificial incubation system, these waters teem with baby turtles. As a guest of the resort, you'll have the opportunity to learn about sea turtles from the resident scientists and get a first-hand look (and feel) up close and personal at the touch pool. lemeridien-borabora.com; doubles from US\$471

+ Gaya Island Resort Tucked within the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park amid protected mangroves, coral reefs and the coast of Malohom Bay, Gaya Island Resort serves as an idyllic safe haven for all sorts of endemic wildlife. One of the resort's marquee eco-friendly initiatives is their turtle rescue program, which seeks to rehabilitate and release injured and endangered sea turtles. They even run a turtle hotline that you can call to notify the marine center when an at-risk turtle is found along the shoreline. Guests are encouraged to get involved in conservation efforts, whether that means taking a nature walk with the resident naturalist or volunteering at the marine park. gaya islandresort.com; doubles from RM850.

+ Anantara Layan Phuket The Mai Marine Turtle Foundation in Phuket, founded by the Anantara, is making headway in its mission to rejuvenate the turtle population along the Thai coast. For the past two years, Anantara Layan Phuket has hosted a marine turtle release on its own Layan Beach, where more than 40 endangered marine turtles are released into the ocean annually. Guests are invited to attend the event and have the opportunity to donate to the foundation to adopt a turtle and release it back into the ocean. anantara.com; doubles from Bt12,200.—VERONICA INVEEN



Adopt a turtle at Anantara Layan Phuket.