

# BAROS

maldives

OCTOBER 31 • 2010 The Mail on Sunday

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## Travel

# Why should paradise be only for lovers?

CAMERA PRESS / ADRIAN GREEN



**SINGULAR DELIGHT:** Fearne Cotton feared she might be out of place on the island of Baros but found the secret is to enjoy doing nothing

**Fearne Cotton turns off her BlackBerry, relaxes – and discovers that you can enjoy the romantic Maldives without a man**

**T**HE Maldives are always at the top of honeymoon destination wish-lists, and if there was a loved-up capital of the world, these islands in the Indian Ocean would be it.

But here I was, heading to this romantically charged hotspot without so much as a boyfriend to lug my small but perfectly formed suitcase.

I feared that as a man-less woman in a world of happy couples, I would stick out like a very sore thumb.

This was the first anxiety about my Maldives holiday. My second was that I am such a fidget I feared I might become

a bit bored with all that wonderful island bliss. Put simply, would there be enough to do?

To my great relief, all these worries were dispelled as, happily ensconced in Baros – a small, lush tropical island set in the shimmering waters of a shallow lagoon in the North Male Atoll – I worked out what the true Maldives were all about.

It's not just a place for a fine romance – it has something that any traveller is glad to discover: the joy of doing nothing.

I went with a girl who is one of my best friends and we quickly realised we were in for a happy time chilling out. In fact, it

would be hard to imagine a more perfect place than Baros for letting the cares of the outside world slip away. From the moment I arrived, my BlackBerry and mobile phone were switched off (I'm

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slightly ashamed to admit, however, that I kept track of my emails via laptop – there are limits to the amount you really want to escape) and I learned to relax.

Getting to the Maldives has become much easier thanks to the growing number of direct flights. We travelled on the direct service with British Airways. It was an overnight flight, so we slept on the plane and woke as we arrived in brilliant sunshine. From the airport at Male, it's a speedboat ride of about 25 minutes to Baros.

Being in my late 20s and enjoying a hectic life, I've never been one to covet the pleasures associated with getting 'away from it all'. But Baros persuaded me that there are times to take a step back from the madness of modern life.

To say we did nothing at all on Baros, however, would hardly be accurate. There was eating to be done – and what meals! – along with yoga sessions and fantastic cruises to spot dolphins, which were particularly special for me as I had never seen these amazing creatures in the wild.

Anyone planning a trip to the Maldives shouldn't assume that a holiday there is a Robinson Crusoe affair where you have a bamboo shelter on a beach. Our over-the-water villa had all the comforts of home, with an iPod dock, a TV and DVD player – we took our own films – and good wi-fi reception everywhere. In fact, we were living in the lap of luxury with every facility at our disposal.

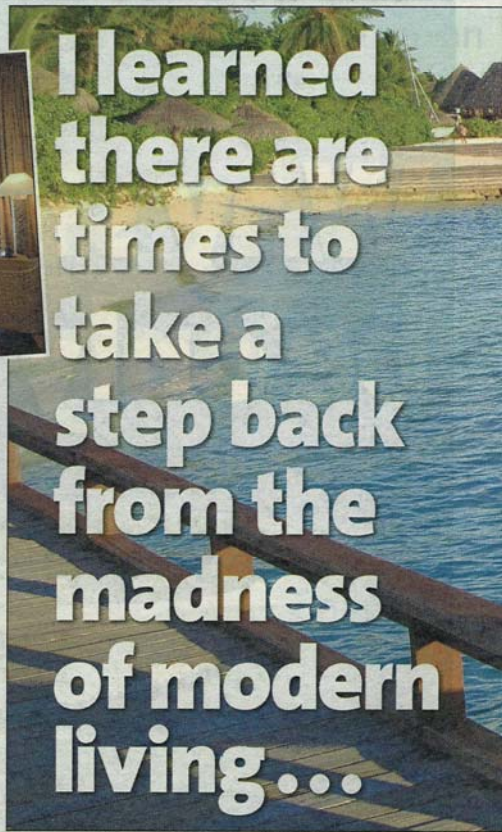
I've been on retreat-style holidays where you are subject to quite a tough regime of controlled diets, exercise and meditation, and that level of control can be rather annoying.

**O**N BAROS you choose how much you want to relax. We did exercise – I loved going to the gym to do yoga – but we enjoyed watching the sunsets much more.

This was a big daily event, best enjoyed with a glass of champagne in hand.

Also out watching the sunsets, of course, were the happy couples, but they didn't dominate the island. Indeed, I was surprised to see that the resort also attracts a lot of families with older children.

If you have a frantic job and you're looking for a complete break where you can enjoy quality time with children you barely see during the working week,



## I learned there are times to take a step back from the madness of modern living...

then the Maldives is a perfect destination.

On Baros you can socialise as much or as little as you like. You can remain in your villa, hardly ever venturing out, if that's what you prefer. We really liked heading to the bar each evening before and after dinner, chatting to people over a drink.

One of the great pleasures of the Maldives – and you hear this from many people who have holidayed there – is how lovely the staff are: the nicest of people, so polite and so gentle. We made friends with quite a few of them.

Inevitably, the high points of our day were the meals, which were spectacularly good.

The accent is on healthy eating. This doesn't mean that you can't spend the day drinking and slobbering out on the beach, but the good-living ethos of the resort means you tend to do things that foster your wellbeing.

I was grateful for the opportunity to try lots of new food. Everything from curries to salad is prepared in front of you.

Baros's top restaurant is The Lighthouse, which features elaborate seafood as well as modern fusion cuisine with Asian and Mediterranean influences. An evening meal there we declared to be one of the finest of our lives.

And it's worth coming here just for the Lighthouse Lounge, a martini and champagne bar that has a fabulous terrace with 360-degree views of the ocean. Lime Restaurant near the sea is the place for fabulous breakfasts – so fine that some guests would leap out of bed and run there every morning.

**T**HE Cayenne Grill ('alfresco dining in thatched gazebos offering niches of privacy above the lagoon') serves seafood, fish, meat and vegetarian dishes 'served with flavours of distinction and accompanied by a healthy selection of salads and irresistible desserts'.

It was here we discovered the range and variety of the cooking when, on our first night, we sat down to the weekly Maldivian feast set out as a huge buffet. If the restaurants aren't of interest, you can order food 24 hours a day – breakfast, snacks, meals and drinks are served in the villas.

There may be some who opt for privacy. We didn't quite live the monastic life – we enjoyed having cocktails in the evening and a few drinks with our dinner, but we did our healthy thing during the day.

We loved going to a cookery demonstration with Damian, the head chef, who became

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### GETTING THERE

For further information on Baros, visit [www.baros.com](http://www.baros.com). British Airways (0844 493 0787, [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) flies directly to the Maldives from Gatwick three times a week. Prices start from £677 return. Seasons (01244 202 000, [www.seasons.co.uk](http://www.seasons.co.uk)) offers seven nights at Baros from £1,710 including accommodation in a deluxe villa, breakfast, British Airways flights and private transfers.

**SERVICE WITH A SMILE:**  
Resort staff welcome guests



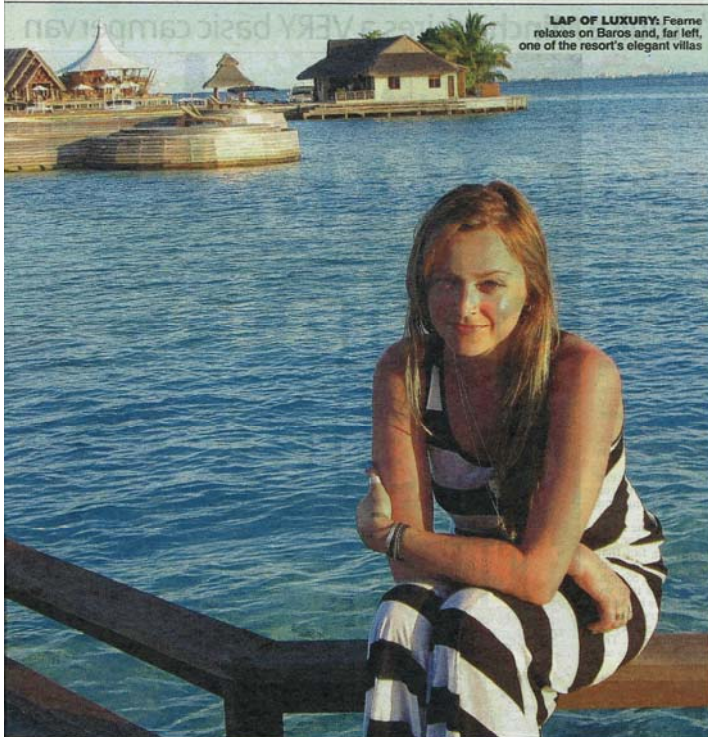
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**LAP OF LUXURY:** Feame relaxes on Baros and, far left, one of the resort's elegant villas

one of our great island friends. I'm an atrocious cook so I was really grateful to get the benefit of some basic tips.

Damian is an Australian who has worked in the Maldives for five years with a team of chefs from the islands and Sri Lanka.

He demonstrated how to make a number of dishes from the restaurant menus, and gave us the recipes. They seemed quite easy to make, although I have to admit that I haven't got round to trying them out yet. (Damian gave me his email address and said if I had trouble doing them at home, I could contact him any time.)

What I really liked was the fact that whether you were at breakfast, lunch or dinner, you could often

have your food cooked right in front of you: omelettes for breakfast, for example.

And there was always plenty of locally grown fruit, such as the freshest mangos and pineapples.

One of the treats was to go snorkelling. I've been lucky enough to go diving in Florida, but the marine life in the Maldives is incredible.

Within a few minutes of our first session, we saw a massive reef shark which we were assured wouldn't hurt us, though I have to confess it almost made my heart stop when it loomed up beneath me. We also saw a lot of less scary marine life, such as the wonderful turtles.

But perhaps our greatest indulgence was the island's Aquam

spa. Walking into the newly refurbished building was like entering paradise. Each massage room has its own gardens and patio area with a bath tub where you can relax after your treatment. It was all so lovely.

I had a painful back, which was treated by a delicate little flower of a woman who pounded my shoulders very successfully. All the spa treatments were marvellously reviving: I had come away from London tense after a prolonged period of hard work, but returned home feeling brilliant.

Travelling to the Maldives is good for body and soul. I can honestly say I've never done a trip like that before.

And I can't wait to go back.

## Best of the Maldives – by the experts



**CHIC BUT AFFORDABLE:** Lily Beach offers all-inclusive opulence

**Where would you go for a holiday in the Maldives? Who better to ask than the UK tour operators that specialise in this Indian Ocean holiday destination.**

**BECKY HEAD, Travel Guru Team Leader, Virgin Holidays + Hip Hotels:** The most

enchanting aspect of the Maldives is feeling you are on a Robinson Crusoe-style island, while in the most luxurious yet discreet of settings. One island that offers this experience better than any is Soneva Fushi, in our new Hip Hotels brochure. From the moment guests step off the seaplane, they are truly in paradise. My favourite thing about the island is Cinema Paradiso, the first open-air cinema in the Maldives. Sitting under the stars with a glass of champagne, watching black-and-white movies – simply breathtaking!

**MARK WHITE, Head of Product at Seasons:** The Maldives are still synonymous with most people's idea of a desert-island getaway, and with the number of world-class resorts opening in the region over the next few years, it will remain at the forefront of true luxury destinations. Resorts such as the new Shangri-La offer a huge range of facilities to cater for both couples or families, offering a romantic getaway or a full-on activity-based holiday.

**ALISON SCOTT, Commercial Director, Elegant Resorts:** All the resorts have very distinct styles and personalities. The properties in our portfolio are five-star, with similarly good amenities offering excellent service, wonderful spas, great diving, idyllic beaches and delicious food. However, no two islands are the same in terms of atmosphere and ambience. My personal favourite is Huvafen Fushi, with its barefoot philosophy, friendly staff and

laid-back minimalism ... no need to worry about seeing or being seen in the right restaurant in the right beachwear. My advice would be to talk to an expert tour operator who has recently visited the islands. Then all you need to do is lie back, relax and enjoy one of the most beautiful destinations in the world.

**KATHRYN GLOVER, Thomas Cook Signature:** The five-star Lily Beach has undergone a complete luxury refurbishment and now offers an all-inclusive option that allows holidaymakers the opportunity to indulge in all the opulence the Maldives offers with the benefit of being able to budget upfront. As well as gourmet dining and chic villas, Lily Beach features a range of watersports and excursions, including sunset fishing, cocktail cruises, stargazing and fish feeding, all included in the price.

**GEMMA ROWLEY, TUI Product Manager, Maldives:** One of the most exciting developments has to be the opening of the first 24-hour all-inclusive island in our programme, Vilamendhoo Island Resort & Spa, with one of our preferred suppliers, Crown and Champa. For the first time, customers will be able to enjoy food and drink around the clock without worrying about paying more. Extras such as afternoon tea are included, as well as fully stocked mini-bars in the rooms.

**JOANNE LOWERY, Netflights.com, Destination Manager Indian Ocean:** I would highly recommend the Vivanta by Taj Coral Reef. Perfect for waters-lovers, the resort offers superb diving opportunities for learners and more experienced divers alike, with its own house reef and shipwreck to explore. Waterskiing, windsurfing, sailing and snorkelling tours are also available but the highlight of any stay is feeding the stingrays that come up to shore each evening.