

NEW TREND: ZEN BREAKS

Sometimes you have to go to the other side of the world to completely reset...

By Jacqui Mooney

SEAPLANE ANYONE?

Perched on a tiny atoll, the only way onto the resort is via a 25-minute flight from Male.



FOOD ENVY

The biggest decision daily? Where to eat. Japanese. Middle Eastern. Or mega salads at a beachside bar.



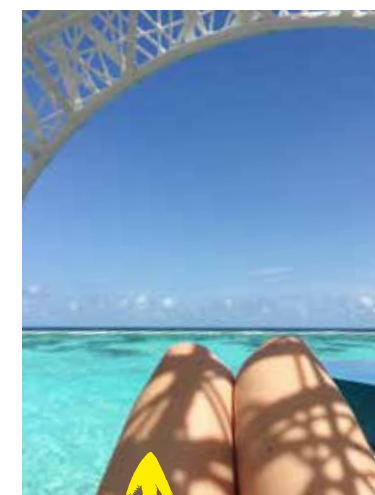
SPA GOALS

Yep, the spa includes private treatment rooms with a view of the sea floor.



TREE OF WISHES

Guests write a wish onto long silk ribbons and tie them here. Once a year, a ribbon is chosen at random. The lucky owner scores a free return holiday.



SUSTAINABLE LUXURY

As if being surrounded by ocean isn't enough, some villas also boast a private pool.



DISCO INFERNO

The resort's world-famous disco toilet. Complete with air-con, a photo booth and (on busy nights) a DJ!

Once upon a time, holidays were about doing absolutely nothing. Now, thanks to the crazy-busy pace of life, we're demanding a little more from our downtime. And a new breed of wellness holidays springing up around the globe are delivering just that.

Which is exactly how I found myself 9000km from Sydney, lying on a yoga mat in a serene grove overlooking the Indian Ocean, in the middle of an ancient Tibetan Sound Healing experience at LUX South Ari Atoll in the Maldives. In mid-2017, the resort launched a series of Australian-designed, expert-led wellness workshops, offering everything from book binding, photography and kombucha making to watercolour and wine escapes. So after an intense eight months of non-stop deadlines,

the chance to relax, recharge and dial down stress with five days of yin yoga and sound healing led by master practitioner Phoebe Joel (who travels the world sharing this modality, splitting her time between Bondi and New York) was just too good to pass up. In fact, I couldn't get on board the plane fast enough!

PARADISE, FOUND

On a private, four-kilometre island housing 193 luxury villas with a relaxed, beach-house vibe, the first thing you notice about

INSTA HEAVEN

With 4km of sand, this secluded palm-tree paradise is the most photographed spot on the island.

LUX South Ari as you arrive by seaplane (the only way in) is that this is no ordinary resort. Joined by a series of walkways, with bikes as the preferred mode of transport, it offers guests everything from pizza-making lessons on the beach (yes, really), to a nightly outdoor cinema and 100 per cent organic coffee roasted on the premises (motto: "Life's too short to drink bad coffee" – amen to that). It also boasts seven restaurants (one of which comes with its own kombucha wall, lovingly tendered by executive chef Dave Minten), and daily whale shark watching experiences led by the resort's dedicated marine biologist. In a nutshell, it's designed to be an experience from beginning to end. And as I turned off the light and slipped into bed before the first official day of the retreat, I had no doubt they'd pretty much nailed it.

THE ART OF STILLNESS

As someone who's always struggled with meditation (and switching off in general), the thought of being still and totally surrendering to such an ancient practice had me feeling slightly apprehensive. But within 15 minutes of our first session, I was feeling more relaxed than I'd been in a very long time. So, what is Tibetan Sound Healing? The ancient art uses the deep vibrations of Tibetan singing bowls to soothe stress, improve mental clarity, enhance sleep, promote a sense of deep relaxation and (in short) enhance overall health and wellbeing. Day one focused on yin yoga and sound healing in a purpose-built grove that stepped directly onto a white-sand beach (not a bad location). Day two was all about restorative yoga. But it was the last day, a full sound-healing

experience, that had me so blissed out I practically floated down the beach afterwards. As Phoebe's ridiculously soothing voice (coupled with a gentle sea breeze) had me almost melting into the mat, floor-based yoga poses (held for several minutes at a time) were coupled with breath work, relaxation and a fully immersive "sound bath". At one point, bowls filled with warm water were placed directly onto my body, over its energy centres. In a word, heaven. As we finished with guided meditation, I was so zen I practically fell asleep. And, when I finally did get up, I walked away feeling calm, centred, balanced and like I'd had a month off, in the space of just five days. For this previously sceptical holiday-maker, I'm officially hooked.

Women's Health was a guest of LUX South Ari Atoll Maldives. For all the details, visit luxresorts.com **WH**

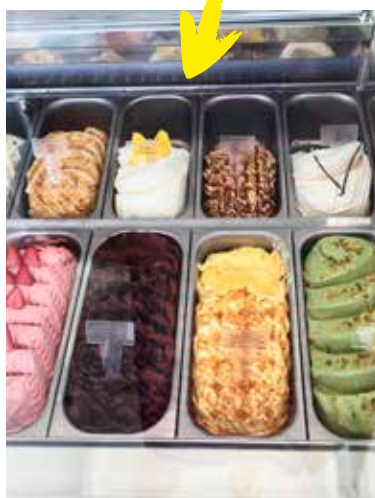
MARINE MAGIC

If you're lucky, swim with sea life, including giant whale sharks!



BEACH GELATO

Sweet craving? The resort has its own beachside ice-cream shop and a mobile cart.



WHAT IS IT?

Tibetan Sound Healing is an ancient practice that uses the deep vibration and energy generated by Tibetan singing bowls to bring harmony to the body, mind and soul. To find out more about it and practitioner Phoebe Joel, head to tibetansoundhealing.com