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BRITISH EDITION

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THE
HEROES
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YAHYA ABDUL- MATEEN II

**The Matrix Resurrections star
wants you to choose the red pill**



SHAMIN ABAS
COMMUNICATIONS FOR ULTRA-LUXURY BRANDS

Manifest this*

**This being barefoot Maldivian luxury for wannabe castaways*

Story by Jonathan Heaf



How do luxury brands – whether cars, trainers or, yes, far-flung luxury desert islands – come up with their names? It is, of course, all about conjuring aspiration and projection. If one were to road test a Ford Mustang, for example, even if you knew nothing of the iconic muscle car one would be correct in assuming that the vehicle might be somewhat feral, fast and compact, rather than a slow-moving, hippo-sized SUV. It's plain, immediate word association.

And so to The Nautilus, the name of this dreamy spit of an idyll found some way into the cyan-washed Maldivian surf, on the island of Thiladhoo (Baa Atoll), to be exact. Without cheating, what images and mood does that word "Nautilus" prompt? Space flight? Sail-powered adventuring into far-flung locations? Or can you, like me, think only of Captain Nemo's submarine of the same name, as described by Jules Verne in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*?

In a way, The Nautilus is all these things; requiring leaps of both the physical and the mental, the genre of this resort being both fantasy and nonfiction. Of course, the Maldives itself has long been a place of mythmaking for the beaten-down, urbanite traveller in need of some serious winter luxury (and sun). Yet, often the larger resorts can seem a touch gimmicky, rather than modern, aware of its place in a rapidly changing world and designed with purpose. The Nautilus – so boutique as to be beyond intimate – is different, I'm pleased to say.

Once you land from the long haul at Velana International Airport, for example, you need to hop on a seaplane for around 80 miles in a northwesterly direction. Aside from an



The Nautilus has 26 beach and ocean 'houses'



extra-soaring thrill, this zippy plane ride helps to underline the resort's otherworldliness. Let's face it, you've booked and paid for an extraordinary holiday; you can't get "extraordinary" on the 143 bus route. Believe me, I've tried.

It's a scientific fact (kinda) that the more palm trees and coral reefs one sees from outside a tiny plane window, the more one's relentlessly overworked shoulder muscles begin to soften. Gone are the cityscapes and Tupperware skies and in their place are all the bonkers kaleidoscopic optics that come with this part of the natural world. As your seaplane gently splashes down alongside an ocean-tethered pontoon, you and your lucky travellers will take a luxury yacht the final few minutes to the resort. (If this sounds a little *too* remote, fear not: the vibe is still pristine Loro Piana deck shoes, rather than too-worn Birkenstocks.)





Activities include reef diving, dolphin tours and dining at the Ocaso restaurant (below)

The vibe is pristine Loro Piana deck shoes

The resort itself seems almost too good to be true: fine sand so white it's almost pink, those tall swaying trees and what seems like only a handful of thatched pavilions. There are 26 rooms, or "houses", in total, which can be found either on the beachfront or in a shell (or nautilus, for sea-creature spotters)-shaped arrangement on stilts hovering over the water. Whichever you pick, all rooms come with private pools and have separate living rooms adjacent to huge bedrooms.

With nature so close and so gobsmacking, the owners have done well not to try to compete by using too much needy interior design flair. Taste levels are exceptional, with the aesthetic being natural and harmonious: high ceilings, conical-shaped roofs, bead chandeliers and, of course, a television as big as your local cinema screen. If you get bored watching paradise sail



past on your private deck, first indulge yourself by watching any of the innumerable free movies available, then scold yourself for being so spoiled.

During the day you can either bake (safely) under the sun or take on a variety of salty activities, all of which feel bespoke and tailor-made to you. The dive centre offers outings to dozens of different sites, all suited to different skill levels, while the resort's exceptionally good-natured staff are on hand to suggest trips to lone sandbanks and uninhabited islands. But whether taking a luxury yacht dolphin watching or one of the resort's transparent kayaks along the surf line, our advice is to, for heaven's sake, take your time. Nothing feels as good as simply having nothing to do, especially with such a view. Drink in the scenes and then drink up a Piña Colada.

The "anything goes" concept threads right the way through to the food and drink on offer. With personal butlers hovering quietly nearby, guests are encouraged to order pretty much whatever their heart desires. (Though, sadly, they didn't respond to our continued requests to be left shipwrecked with only rum on a nearby pristine sandbar, forever.) For *GQ*, most of the time this involved a frost-coated beer combined with burger and chips, but, quite rightly, a more sophisticated palate is catered for, too, with a mix of Asian and Mediterranean dishes all fresh and on hand.

The downside to such a gem of a resort is, of course, leaving. As one jumps back onto the seaplane, the brow a little less furrowed, and watches as Thiladhoo gets smaller and smaller, one is reminded that, due to rising sea levels, all this gilded beauty and splendour is but temporary. The fact is the Maldives could be completely submerged in less than 100 years. A fantasy worth travelling for? Undoubtedly. Just don't wait too long.

HOUSES AROUND £2,500 PER NIGHT, THE NAUTILUS MALDIVES, THILADHOO ISLAND, BAA ATOLL, MALDIVES. THENAUTILUSMALDIVES.COM

