



THE
COMFORT OF
TURQUOISE



Shangri-La's Villingili Resort & Spa
Maldives



SHANGRI-LA'S VILLINGILI RESORT & SPA
MALDIVES

THERE'S NO
GREATER ACT OF
HOSPITALITY
THAN TO EMBRACE
A STRANGER
AS ONE'S OWN.



HAVING JUST DIPPED UNDER SOME CUMULUS clouds that looked more like a bunch of billowing white balloons, the rumble of the plane's engine slowed to a purr, confirming that we were about to land. I gazed down below where a dozen or two thatched-roof villas dotted the ocean, framed perfectly with no less than two kilometres of angel white beaches and a flurry of emerald green hinterland.

Even from 100 feet in the air, I could see right through the water, sparkling with a shade of blue so brilliant it would have put a sapphire to shame. Just beneath the surface, schools of fish darted this way and that, and intricate coral formations swayed from side to side, as if welcoming us to their abode. Taking it all in with a deep and long inhale, my heart skipped with elation; finally, we had arrived at our resort, this sanctuary of pure perfection somewhere in the midst of the magnificent Indian Ocean.







WE AWOKE THAT MORNING TO THE sound of waves rippling beneath us and a view of the ocean stretching for as far as the eye could see. Feeling refreshed, I rolled out of bed and dangled my feet off the deck of our villa and into the crystal clear waters below. A lone fish, aglow with orange and blue stripes, flittered around my feet curiously, and all around, the water glistened in the morning sunlight, as if a million tiny diamonds were afloat on its surface.

Perched there in the middle of this vast expanse, I was awash with a deep and sincere contentment. Nothing in the world made me happier than being in the company of the sea; its enormity put everything into perspective, and with my heart filled with nothing but joy, I could not wait to see what the day was going to bring.







WHILST THE RESTAURANT FACED THE Indian Ocean, it was a warm breeze from the Arabian Sea next door that sailed in, filling the room with the mysteries of the Middle East. Warm clay tiles and a beautifully carved wooden ceiling complemented our meze platter perfectly. Our second course, a fragrant Vietnamese salad of mint, herbs and prawns fresh from the South China Sea, reminded us that there, at Dr Ali's, we were truly blessed with the company of the fine seas.

The next night, dinner was served in the jungle between two banyan trees, their gigantic roots embracing our table, immaculately set for two. The ambience was dreamlike, with fireflies flickering high in the branches, crickets chirping in the distance and the golden flames of two torches crackling beside us. Everything was so intimate, so perfect, that for most of the night, we had lost sense of where we were, but it hardly even mattered.







LIKE A GRUMPY OLD MAN, THE TURTLE peered at me from behind a rocky wall of coral, his beady eyes watching me closely. Keeping my distance, I observed him too; he was solid, stoic, yet there was a remarkable peacefulness about him. Thinking it best to give him his space, I swam away, only to sense him a moment later by my side. Every bit as surreal as it was exhilarating, we swam together for a few metres before he veered off into the blue yonder, leaving me alone again, my heart beating fast.

Our snorkelling trip ended perfectly back on land in the company of towering banyan trees and hundreds of hibiscus flowers blazing across the sky like a ruby necklace. We trekked into the afternoon and finally found ourselves at a beautiful blue lagoon just as the sun had dipped under the horizon, leaving its incandescent orange spray all over the twilit sky.









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"There, to his joy and surprise, he found a friendly and prosperous population who made haste to display what I have always regarded as our oldest tradition — that of hospitality to strangers." *Lost Horizon*, James Hilton

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