



TRAVEL

# Taste of Paradise

Join us as we explore the unique cuisine of the Maldives

**LAZILY SPREADING SOUTH FROM** India into the vast Indian Ocean, like a treasure trail of lost jewels, the 1,100 islands that make up the Maldives have become one of the planet's must-visit destinations, drawing tourists in with their paradisiacal beaches and palm tree idylls. Beyond the admittedly gorgeous scenery, however, lies one of the region's most intriguing cuisines.



TRYING THE TRADITIONAL

It's no great surprise that Maldivian cuisine has been historically made from three main ingredients: coconuts, rice and fish. Given that

the island nation covers some 90,000 square kilometres – albeit with just 300 square kilometres of land – the waters offer bountiful seafood. Not to say that the food is bland – over the centuries, simple traditional recipes have been combined with the spices, the curries and the herbs brought to the islands by European, Arabic and Indian traders to create a piquant, though oddly familiar array of dishes. The usual breakfast is *mas huni*, a mix of finely chopped tuna and grated coconut eaten with freshly baked *roshi* – the local version of our roti – and a sweet, hot tea. For lunch, the most common dish is *garudhiya*, a spicy traditional tuna soup served with rice, lime, onion and chilli. Then

there's favourite local desserts, with the standout being *dhonkeyo kajuru*, or fried banana cake. If you're on a diet, consider it a special treat for yourself in paradise.



DINING IN THE CAPITAL

Incredibly, more than 150,000 people – a third of the country's population – are packed into the six square kilometres that make up the Maldives' capital island of Malé. Once known as the King's Island, from where the sultans of old ruled over the country within a fortified citadel, today, it's a buzzing centre of commerce and cuisine.

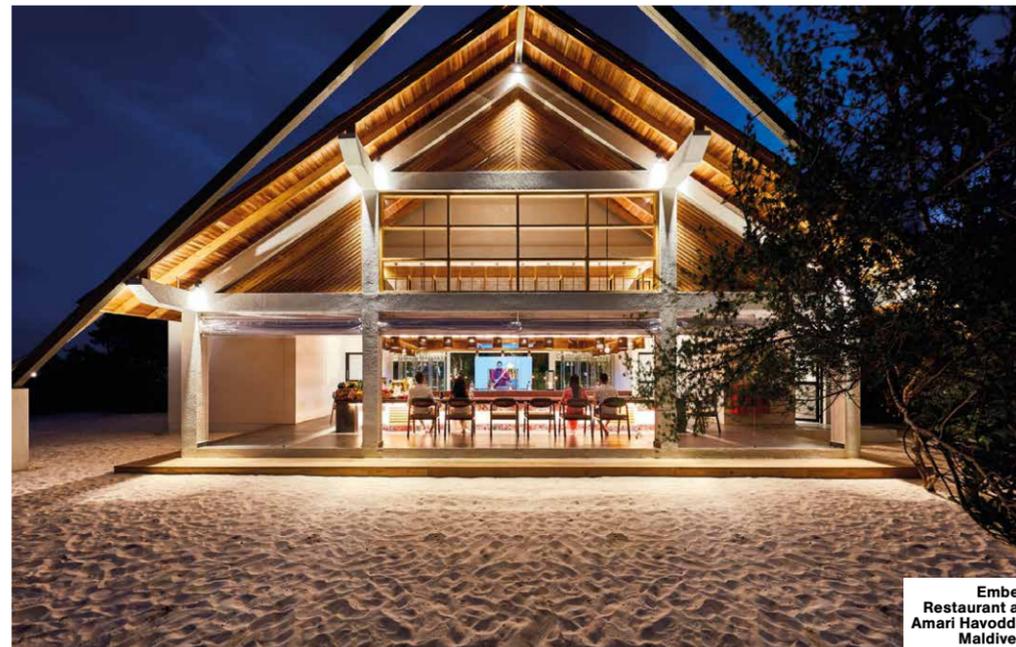
Although you won't find many of the high-end restaurants that exist on the remote resorts in the outer atolls, Malé is a great place to mix with the locals in the simple teahouses, while also enjoying a wide variety of international dishes. Highlights include Sala Thai ([salafamilymaldives.com](http://salafamilymaldives.com)) – oddly, Thai is one of the dominant foreign cuisines in the capital – the Indian and Sri Lankan dishes at Belle Amie Bistro ([facebook.com/belleamiemale](http://facebook.com/belleamiemale)), and the Asian fusion served up at City Garden ([city.com.mv](http://city.com.mv)), which has a pleasant terrace facing the harbour. For decent coffee, make your way to the Pine Café ([facebook.com/pinecafemv](http://facebook.com/pinecafemv)).

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON N. OSTHEIMER



LAPPING UP LUXURY

Given that the highest natural point of the Maldives is only 2.4 metres above sea level, it perhaps makes sense that the nation's top restaurants can be found underwater, where you dine surrounded by marine life. To reach Ithaa ([conradhotels.com](http://conradhotels.com)), you descend a spiral staircase into a see-through space some five metres below the waves. With seating for just 14, Ithaa (it means “mother of pearl” in the Maldivian language, Divehi) serves up contemporary European cuisine with an emphasis on high-end ingredients. Meanwhile, over at SEA ([kihavah-maldives.anantara.com](http://kihavah-maldives.anantara.com)),



Ember Restaurant at Amari Havodda Maldives



Eat underwater at the Anantara Kihavah restaurant

which claims to have the world's first underwater wine cellar, a similarly grandiose menu includes potato-crust sea bream and wagyu beef Wellington. But be warned that a meal at either of these locations could run into the hundreds of US dollars. For something above the waterline, book an ocean-side table at Thila ([kurumba.com](http://kurumba.com)) on Vihamanafushi island north of Malé, from where you can enjoy a spectacular seafood dinner while watching reef sharks swim by. Alternatively, non-meat eaters will have a feast to remember at Just Veg ([atmosphere-kanifushi.com](http://atmosphere-kanifushi.com)) on Kanifushi, where they only serve – you guessed it – a menu of unexpected and excellent vegetarian dishes. Last but not least, at the newly opened Amari Havodda Maldives ([amari.com](http://amari.com)) on the remote Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll in the far south of the island chain, specialty robotayaki restaurant Ember serves up a fantastic gym-diet selection of grilled prime cuts and seafood.



GETTING THERE

Sri Lankan Airlines flies from Kuala Lumpur to Malé via Colombo for around RM1,700 return, while Malaysia Airlines costs RM2,000 return, with flights taking eight hours each way.



Dine on the beach at the Conrad Maldives