



travelista

Frequent flyer Claire Wrathall **fast-tracks international intelligence on where to be and what to see.**

Long an idyll for holiday-makers intent on doing nothing, the **MALDIVES** have not historically offered much in the way of activities beyond unforgettable snorkelling. But Shangri-La's new Villingili Resort and Spa (www.shangri-la.com; doubles from \$1,328), which opens at the end of July within the Addu Atoll (eight minutes by speedboat from the airport on Gan), is a first in several respects. Not only is

it the sole resort in the archipelago that lies south of the equator, it also offers guests an unprecedented insight into Maldivian local life thanks to a 17km cycle path that links it with the islands of Feydhoo, Maradhoo and Hithadhoo via transwater causeways. Guests can borrow pushbikes and ride through remote fishing villages, pausing to watch fishermen unload the day's catch, picnic on secluded beaches, even shop for local crafts (in which case, Feydhoo is your best bet). Though, of course, you'd be forgiven for not wanting to stir from the resort's 2km white-sand beach or the terrace of your treehouse villa.

Given the scarcity of direct flights from Europe to the Maldives, there's now an added reason to transit through DOHA (at least, as long as you fly on one of Qatar Airways' new 777s, which have properly flat flatbeds). Obviously, there's the new Museum of Islamic Arts, but there's also a just-opened Grand Hyatt (www.hyatt.com; doubles from £165), the latest in a troika of major Hyatt openings following on from SHANGHAI and ISTANBUL (where the Spa King rooms have en-suite Turkish baths with steam room, deep tub and rain shower).

Located in the West Bay Lagoon area, 20km from the airport, the palatial beachfront Doha Hyatt is already winning plaudits – not least for its Anne Sémonin spa, a niche French brand whose superb Eternal Youth Facial has a devoted following. Alternatively, check out her new spa at Lucknam Park (www.lucknampark.co.uk; doubles from £280), just outside Bath in WILTSHIRE, and arguably the loveliest country house hotel in England's West Country. Incidentally, there are few more effective ways to buff one's body for the beach than her Black Sand Body Scrub (€78 for 200ml).

Still in the UK, just 28 miles off the Cornish coast, the Isles of Scilly are perhaps the closest the British Isles get to a Maldivian landscape, inasmuch as there are expansive white-sand beaches lapped by clear water and 150

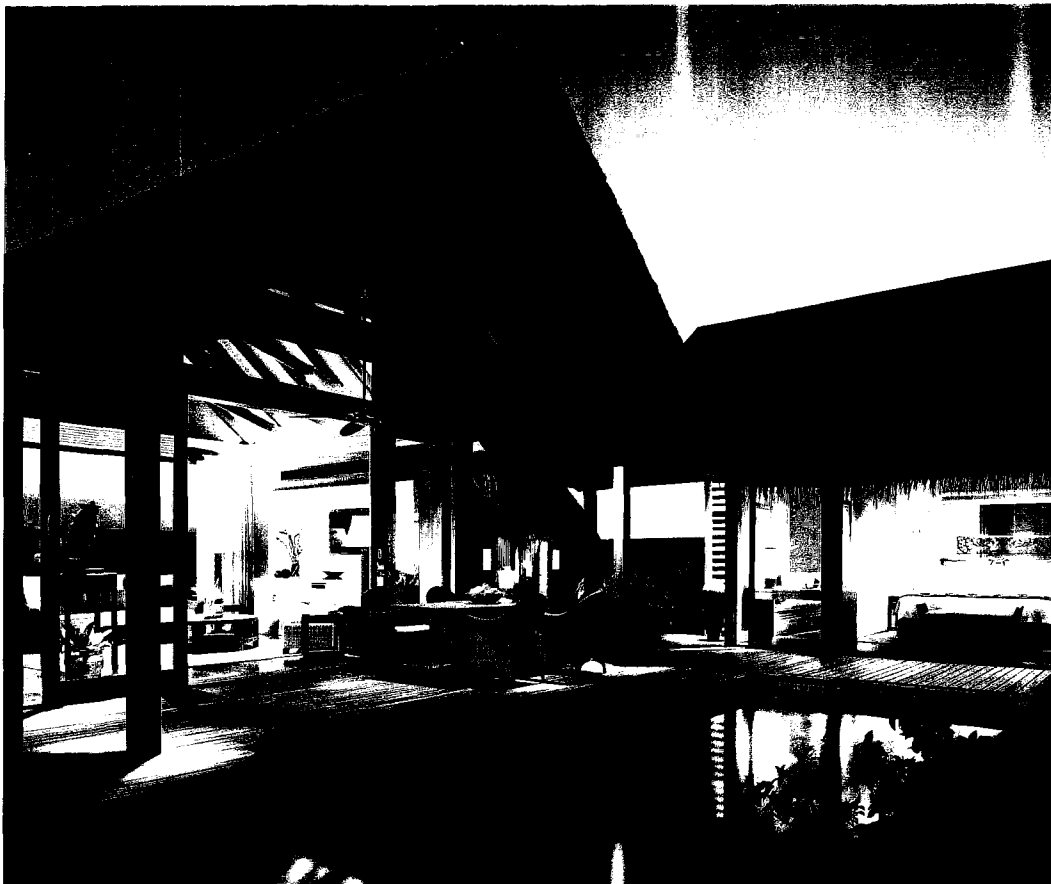
dive sites, even if the ambient temperature of this subtropical environment is rather cooler. Still privately owned, TRESKO has long been the most modish island to stay on, and this summer the new Flying Boat Club (www.tresco.co.uk; from £2,720 a week) increases the range of desirable accommodation. Built on what was once a naval air station, the Club consists of 12 cedar-clad New England-style beach houses that sleep between six and 10, a clubhouse that serves meals, spa, gym, indoor swimming pool and Astroturf tennis courts.

The Croatian island of KORCULA is another idyllic base for a laidback seaside holiday, where the word the locals use to evoke the contagiously slowed-down pace of life is *fjaka*. Unlike its glitzier neighbour Hvar, there's no nightlife to speak of, but there is a new hotel, the Lesic Dimitri Palace (www.lesic-dimitri.com; doubles from €195), the first truly grand property on the island, with its own motor yacht and a spa coming later in the year. Located next door to the house where locals claim Marco Polo was born, it has been converted from an 18th-century bishop's palace and five adjoining medieval houses, each of which is let as a single suite of one to four bedrooms.

If you're planning to be in BUENOS AIRES, the Jardin Escondido (www.coppolajardinescondido.com) in the happening district of Palermo Soho is very much the place to stay. It belongs to Francis Ford Coppola, who bought it so that he would have a base in the city while shooting his latest film, *Tetro*, and whose Belize hotels (www.blancaneaux.com) are proof that he is every bit as accomplished a hotelier as film director. A secluded colonial mansion with a hidden garden – hence its name – at its heart, as well as a small pool, it is ideally let to parties of friends (it sleeps 10 and there's a permanent staff of three) but also functions as a B&B that you can reserve by the floor. Book through Black Tomato (www.blacktomato.com), which is offering five nights from £1,699 per person including flights.

Finally, today sees the opening of Renzo Piano's Modern Wing, an expansive extension to the Art Institute of CHICAGO (www.artic.edu) that will boost its exhibition space by a third, making it the second largest museum in the US (only New York's Metropolitan is bigger). With its floating roof and elegant glass-and-limestone façade, not to mention the views through its soaring windows of the city skyline and Millennium Park, it's a building to rival the outstanding art collection it's been built to house. ♦

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Above: one of Shangri-La's new villas at Villingili Resort, Maldives. Below: a 17th-century Turkish dish and 10th-century Spanish bronze, both at Doha Museum of Islamic Arts.

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**Above: explore the
Maldives' Addu Atoll
by bike from Villingili
Resort. Below right:
Lucknam Park Hotel
near Bath has a new spa
by Anne Sémonin.**

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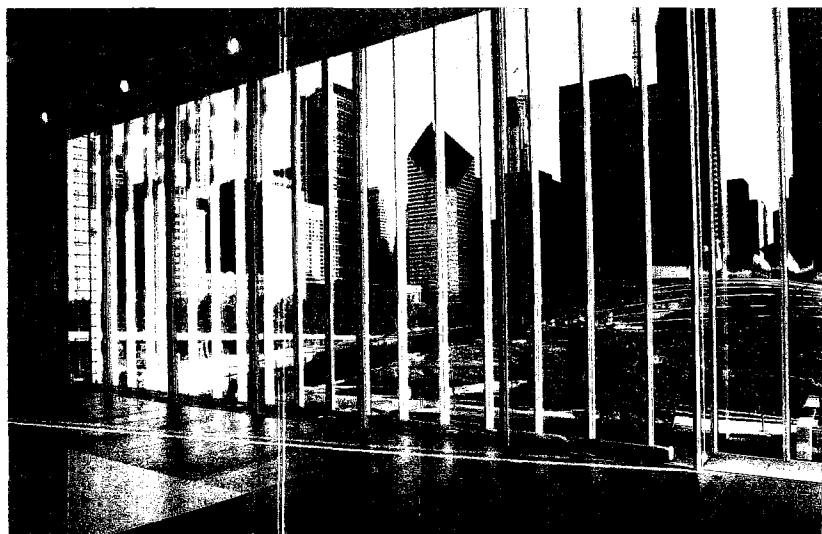


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Above: Francis Ford
Coppola's colonial oasis,
the Jardin Escondido,
Buenos Aires. **Below:** the
white sandy beaches of
Tresco, Isles of Scilly.



Below: stunning
cityscapes from the Art
Institute of Chicago's new
Modern Wing. **Bottom:**
the cathedral in Korcula
Old Town, on the island
of Korcula, Croatia.



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