

COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

A woman with a large, voluminous wig made of soft, pastel-colored clouds (pink, purple, blue, and yellow) is the central figure. She has her eyes closed and a serene expression. The wig is adorned with several small, sparkling diamond-like ornaments. She is wearing a white, button-down jacket. The background is a solid, vibrant blue.

A LIFE IN BALANCE

JUL/AUG 2023 £4.95

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DREAMING**
of a better,
brighter future

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guide
dedicated
to personal
& planetary
health

Edited by
DAISY FINER

WELLBEING GUIDE

Mindful Adventuring

Where to rediscover yourself and our beautiful planet

FOUR SEASONS LANDAA GIRAARU, *Maldives*

Top-class doctors, a 'planetary wellbeing' approach and a profound respect for their location makes this Maldivian pearl an outstanding wellness star, says *Lucy Cleland*



I was told many moons ago at Germany's pre-eminent fasting clinic, Buchinger Wilhelmi, that practising yoga would ease me through my menopausal transition. I wish I'd listened, as my rage-filled moods, petty frustrations and disconcerting memory loss began poleaxing me earlier this year. Not to stress though (we know stress really is a killer), I'm here being earthed, anointed and enlightened at Four Seasons Landaa Giraavaru, a 3km coral island in the Baa Atoll, a Unesco biosphere reserve in the Maldives.

You don't automatically equate the Maldives with wellbeing, but Four Seasons is carving its niche cleverly by gathering the best of the best



Reconnect with yourself and nature in the stunning grounds of Landaa Giraavaru



doctors, practitioners and therapists in Ayurveda, naturopathy, yoga (as therapy – the yogis here have trained at the world's first University for Yoga, S-VYASA in Bangalore) and, by the end of the year, nutrition and homoeopathy too. The wellbeing centre, AyurMa, meaning 'mother of life', acts as the island's anchoring centre, spreading out over the pellucid ocean on one side to the lush interior on the other. The overarching ethos is based on what they call 'planetary wellbeing' – of not just healing and caring for ourselves through nature, but also for those around us and, most importantly, for our planet.

What does this mean in reality? It's a nature-connection approach – allowing our city-hardened souls to melt into the breeze, the bird chatter, the rustling leaves, the ocean swell, quieting our monkey minds for a while at least through what we eat, how we move our bodies, breathe, rest, reflect and recharge. If we are settled in ourselves, we have the capacity to care for others – and our environment.

Yoga always starts and ends with breathing practices and chants to centre us and tune us into our surroundings (not hard when it's a full moon swelling brilliantly in the inky sky or an egg-yolk sun lazily coming up for the day). Rituals have been created to balance chakras. 'Align with the Earth', for example, is the perfect regrounding kickstart. After a foot bath, you start by sitting on a chair over frankincense smoke (known in Ayurveda for its purifying effect on the mind and nervous system), wafting up to your root chakra at the base of your spine (Gwyneth would approve). It's then onto the



bed for a delirium-inducing four-handed slow massage for 90 minutes with the grounding oils of vetiver, ginger, patchouli and jatamansi. Your mind floats. Your body melts.

Complimentary consultations (for all guests) with both a naturopathic and an ayurvedic doctor (both outstanding) can offer a deeper exploration into any afflictions you may be suffering. My perimenopausal state was easily picked up through pulse readings – leading to being diagnosed as vata dominant, which negatively presents as anxiety, insomnia and digestive issues like bloating. Hell yeah. Menus at the four (incredible) restaurants flag the dishes best suited to your dosha, so choosing the foods to balance you is a doddle.

One of the more subtle ways of honouring this planetary ethos is a daily ‘earth ritual’ that you might think of skipping as woo-woo, but don’t – it’s an unveiling into spirituality. Every evening guests and staff sit together to sing a repetitive mantra giving thanks to the earth – even though it’s in Sanskrit, it’s easy to follow and soon you’re smiling (or crying) as voices rise up as one over the sea. It’s their way of giving thanks for the day, anchoring us once more to where we are in the here and now.

And that matters, because it is impossible to ignore the elephant in the room when it comes to these almost-impertinently pristine islands (on the surface at least), which are at the forefront of suffering the chilling effects of rising temperatures and sea-level changes. The first resort opened in 1972 and, since then, particularly in the past few years, new openings have proliferated at pace (there are around 160 resorts currently), luring those with disposable incomes, along with our polluting aeroplanes, our waste and our penchant for Norwegian salmon.

Around 90 percent of the coral reef has been bleached since 1998 in a series of natural – yet climate change-turbocharged – El Niño weather patterns (if you take a snorkelling trip, you can see



There is a turtle rehabilitation centre on the island caring for creatures injured by boats or fishing nets

this grey underwater world bereft of its healthy kaleidoscopic colour). And with everything in the Maldives dependent on its reefs, this is bad news indeed.

Four Seasons Landaa Giraavaru, though, takes its role as guardian and regenerator seriously. It provides funding, accommodation and salaries to NGOs such as Reefscapers (marine biologists who are recolonising the coral frame by frame, as well as rehabilitating turtles whose flippers have had to be amputated after getting caught up in fishing nets) and the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme, which conducts groundbreaking studies into this remarkable species so emblematic of the islands. We, as guests, are encouraged to learn about this work at the marine centre – and, hopefully, to fall in love with these mysterious sea creatures and therefore raise awareness and funds to protect them. They also have an excellent apprenticeship programme, taking on 60 local children every year who, by the end, are awarded a national certificate and very high employment prospects.

Resorts like this (just like any luxury brand) have power and influence – and therefore responsibility. For privileged guests, Four Seasons is to send them back rested, relaxed, with a renewed appreciation of our natural world and therefore more determination (and, frankly, with the means) to help protect it.

You can’t guarantee that, of course, but for those looking to reconnect with nature – and bring its teachings back home – it’s all there, wrapped up in those glittering surroundings and the kind hearts and healing hands of those who serve you. Just open yourself to receiving it – and pay it forward.

BOOK IT: Beachfront bungalows with pool from around £1,436 plus service charge and taxes. fourseasons.com



FROM TOP: Casa Chablé,
The Well, Eleven Rio Palena Lodge

CASA CHABLÉ

nr Tulum, Mexico

Just south of Tulum yet a world away, the Unesco World Heritage Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve is known for its mangrove-fringed turquoise lagoons, tropical rainforest and Mesoamerican Barrier Reef. It's also the castaway setting for the new Casa Chablé which sits on the site of a former hotel and has an eco-ethos at its core: solar panels provide energy for ten hours a day, electricity is off-grid, water is recycled. There are ten rooms, half in the Casa Principal, which has an open-plan living area and bar; the rest are Robinson Crusoe-style bungalows on the beach. Days are spent spotting frigates from sun loungers, riding fat bikes along the sandy track to the nearest fishing village or out on boat trips to see dolphins and turtles. Deep tissue and relaxing massages happen under a shady palm tree or on your terrace. At open-air restaurant K'uum, chef Williams Saurina uses herbs from the Ka'anche's (traditional, elevated Mayan gardens) and local fish for family-style suppers with dishes such as blue tuna marinated in kombu and mussels with tomato creole sauce. Afterwards, take turns using the telescope for a closer look at the star-studded, inky sky. A laidback hideaway that puts the planet front and centre.

BOOK IT: Doubles from £592 B&B. Full property buyouts available from approx. £6,616 for up to 22 people. chablehotels.com

THE WELL

Kolbotn, Norway

The Well plunges deep – from sustainability to spa immersions, there's nothing half-hearted here. The largest spa in northern Europe (13 kilometres outside Oslo) does the maths with aplomb: 11 pools + 15 sauna and steam rooms + 100 showers ÷ 10,500 square metres nudged up against a forest = bliss for newbies and spa pros alike. The choice is almost overwhelming – onsen or hammam; rhassoul or banya? Soft sauna with tropical soundscape or with gong meditation? Northern lights laconium or art deco tepidarium? Aufguss rituals? There's one for every mood and time of day. Every available centimetre of its roof is solar-panelled; heating is geothermal; 70 percent of water is purified and recycled, and heat is recovered from shower water (which can't be recycled). Even the in-house swimwear collection is made of 82 percent recycled materials. The ethos is Roman – spa as a place to meet, talk and read as much as to float, scrub, ablute. The food (robust brasserie or bijoux Japanese) is fabulous; the hotel is supremely comfortable with immaculate attention to detail. There's a side order of wow factor art (owner Stein Erik Hagen collects art alongside saunas); the staff are delightful and it's remarkably good value. All in all, a perfectly balanced equation.

BOOK IT: Doubles from £160 B&B. Spa day passes from £47. thewell.no



ELEVEN RIO PALENA LODGE

Patagonia, Chile

There is a reason why Patagonia piques the interest of intrepid souls. In an age when every corner of the planet is accessible, the vast landscapes that traverse Argentina and Chile still offer the kind of hard-to-reach remoteness that allows for a journey of discovery and reconnection. Perched on the banks of the River Palena in a pristine Andean valley, Eleven Rio Palena Lodge is best known among anglers for its bountiful fly fishing. However, the beautifully appointed seven-bedroom refuge is a perfectly placed portal for adventurers looking to explore the verdant forests, jagged peaks and glittering glacial lakes Patagonia is so famed for. Under the expert guidance of the Eleven Experience team, guests spend days hiking to tumbling waterfalls, kayaking the river and its rushing rapids, and embarking on flights with 'Ecocopter' to azure alpine lagunas high up in the Andes, activities described as an adventurer's equivalent of a beach day. Returning to the lodge just as golden hour gives way to a firmament aglow with stars, residents are invited to gather for a traditional asado (barbecue) before the generous supply of fresh air, locally farmed fare and pisco sours induce a deep night's sleep.

BOOK IT: Doubles from \$2,501, all inclusive, plus guided activities, drinks and ground transfers. elevenexperience.com

