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Clockwise from top left: an overwater bungalow and lush landscape at Kuda Huraa; the bar at Four Seasons Doha; the Doha skyline; a *dhoni*; the Moroccan restaurant at Kuda Huraa



A Tale of Two Landscapes

Indagare's **Allison Reiber** flew to the Maldives via Doha and here reflects on the two destinations, which couldn't be more different—or exceptional.

Looking down from the seaplane transporting me from [Four Seasons Kuda Huraa](#) (fourseasons.com/maldiveskh) to [Four Seasons Landaa Giraavaru](#) (fourseasons.com/maldiveslg), I surveyed islands and sandbars shaped like oyster shells peppering waters spanning the spectrum of otherworldly blues, from the dark navy of an Amsterdam row house, at the deepest points, to a brilliant turquoise, where the sea is shallower, to aquamarine, where the seafloor is just below the surface.

These areas where the sand is just breaking through make you aware of the fragility of these islands. They aroused in me a sense of urgency I had felt before only in the case of cultures threatened by hasty tourism: you must go to Myanmar before it gets overrun; you must visit the Maldives before they begin to be submerged—some scientists estimate that islands might disappear by the end of the century.

The Maldives consist of 26 atolls comprising roughly 1,190 islands. Coral reefs protect them from erosion caused by waves and providing a home for a rich array of marine life, making for spectacular diving and snorkeling. The reefs are also the source of the world-renowned powder-white beaches. Many scientists believe, however, that they cannot protect these low-lying islands from rising sea levels produced by global warming and that higher water temperatures endanger the coral that provides crucial protection.

A wildly different phenomenon is taking place in Doha, which I visited en route to the Maldives. Qatar Airways, with its award-winning business class, operates two flights daily from the Emirate's capital to Malé, the capital

of the Maldives and entryway to the country's island resorts. The timing of the direct flight from New York allows for an easy overnight at the [Four Seasons Doha](#) (fourseasons.com/doha), which helps combat jet lag and offers just enough time to get a taste of the city. Flying in, what you notice is an expanse of land and a city in the midst of rapid—and dramatic—growth.

Visiting both of these two very different destinations on one trip sharpened the contrasts between them for me. This, in turn, heightened my appreciation for the Maldives' immense natural beauty and the preservation programs of some hotels including the Four Seasons.

It's easy to spend an entire trip exploring the islands' varied underwater world—reef snorkeling, scuba diving, dolphin watching and turtle spotting. The more adventurous can partake in surfing (Kuda Huraa hosts one of the world's most exclusive surf competitions each August). And the best resorts in the Maldives are the ones that support efforts designed to stave off the devastating effects of global warming. The Four Seasons' Marine Discovery Centre, for example, includes coral propagation and turtle rearing programs as well as helping with Manta Ray research initiatives. (Of course there are also sunset cruises, private beach dinners and open-air spa treatments.) It's impossible to visit the Maldives without an urgency to help protect this extremely fragile environment, whether it's by supporting local preservation programs or — perhaps even more important — choosing a resort that does its part. It's a place you leave feeling whole and truly grateful to have discovered this otherworldly beauty.