

Think of the Maldives and your first reaction will probably be to envision images of honeymooning couples blissing out on powdery beaches of white sand, and beautiful villas set on stilts atop an ocean of azure waters so clear you can see right through to the bottom. Then think of a fitness retreat, and you're likely to conjure up thoughts of endless hours of yoga anywhere from the beach to the mountains, or military-esque bootcamps that will leave you gasping for breath after each workout and hobbling back to your room only to collapse in between meals, likely doled out as part of a very restrictive meal plan. If you're anything like us, and vacation time isn't always easy to come by, it can be tough choosing between the two: Do you opt for an escape that will leave you feeling relaxed and rejuvenated, but will need you to put your usual fitness regime on hold (leaving you itching to pick up the weights by the time you get home, inevitably with a bit of the dreaded holiday weight), or do you go for the other end of the spectrum, which could

Flying Solo

Think booking into a healthy holiday means restricting yourself to gruelling bootcamps or zen yoga retreats? Think again. We headed to the idyllic Maldives for a week of head-to-toe wellness with a top celebrity trainer... *By Yi-Hwa Hanna*

Life and Love

leave you fitter and stronger, yes, but possibly needing another holiday afterwards? Well, how about a way to marry the two? This was the mission Coco Palm Resorts, a collection of destinations in the Maldives, decided it was time to tackle. They enlisted a top celebrity fitness trainer and nutritional expert to create a programme that would blend the chance to keep your heart rate pumping while enabling you to relax at the same time, making sure you go home feeling better in every possible way. And with it being offered for the first time, yours truly was a willing guinea pig.

By the time I arrived in the Male airport, fresh off an early morning flight from Dubai, I wasn't feeling particularly bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. I was already apprehensive about the programme—despite the fact that I love to keep fit and work out often, mixing up a huge variety of sport and active pursuits in my daily life, and eat considerably healthily, when you hear that you're heading off to a literal island in the middle of the ocean to spend a week taking on intensive exercise and nutritional guidance, you can't help but wonder how you'll feel by the end of it. Don't get me wrong—I was incredibly excited, since here was a chance to finally come away from a trip feeling both refreshed and fitter than when I left home (this is harder than you think!), but was I going to be able to keep up, both from a physical perspective as well as mentally, with no-one but me, myself and I to turn to as I hobbled back solo to my room each night?

Fortunately, I was greeted at the airport by the incredibly friendly and welcoming staff of my home for the next week, the Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu. Coco



COCO COLLECTION

The award-winning Coco Collection's luxury resorts in the Maldives offer two picturesque options, each with a different feel. Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu (cocopalm.com) is an eco-friendly escape ideal for those seeking a more laid-back and communal vibe, while Coco Palm Bodhu Hithi (cocobodu.hithi.com) is ideal for travellers seeking a luxurious, well-heeled experience. Their wellness retreats start from US \$2,528.

Resorts boasts several properties in their portfolio, with Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu being the more relaxed of their destinations. The resort boasts a five-star experience set on its own idyllic private island in the Baa Atoll, just 124km from the Maldivian capital of Male. After a quick hop and a skip to the local seaplane airport, I was buckled into my seat on a Trans Maldivian Airways flight, and 30 minutes of stunning aerial views later, we landed at a small strip in the middle of the ocean. "Welcome to Coco Palm!" the waiting staff cried out with a smile, lugging my bags onto a traditional dhoni boat that was to whisk us to the resort just a few minutes away.

Island Bliss

Embracing a "barefoot luxury" concept, the entire island of Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu can be explored free-footed if you so wish. Their commitment to maintaining an eco-friendly environment is evident in everything from the greenery—rather than keeping the lush surrounds overly manicured, here stray leaves are swept aside into the underbush to reignite the natural cycle, lending the pathways a truly tropical feel—to the rooms, where guests are encouraged to keep the aircon and lights off any time they're not in use and you're supplied their in-house Coco water in place of branded mineral water. The thatched-roof villas manage to strike the ideal balance between quaint

and luxurious, with four-poster beds swathed in netting (doing the double duty of both keeping you bug-free and encouraging a nostalgic bygone-era feel), with stunning ocean views. If it's the classic houses on stilts you're after, they do offer lagoon-style villas perched atop the azure waters complete with Jacuzzi bathrooms and splash pools on private sun decks. There's just one caveat—hand in hand with the back-to-nature ethos is the fact that rooms don't include a TV, and internet is not widely available on the island, with WiFi only to be found in three spots. While I did, at first, bemoan the inconvenience of not being able to check my email on the regular, by my third day I started to embrace the concept. Not only did it ensure I couldn't

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sequester myself away in my villa working, instead of taking lunchbreaks that, in my regular life, I often forgo, it also meant that during the evenings I would settle down with a good book rather than my nose stuck to a glowing computer screen.

From The Inside Out

With my surrounds taking care of the mental and emotional part of my escape, it was time to focus on the rest of what I'd come for: a physical revival. My trainer for the week was Dave Catudal, a wellness expert currently based in Thailand, where he was formerly Health Director of revolutionary detox and fitness retreat Phuket Cleanse, and is now an author, personal trainer and nutrition expert who is developing his own natural supplements line. Prior to moving to Thailand, Dave was based in Los Angeles, where as a celebrity trainer, his clients roster included A-list celebrity names such as Kate Hudson, Jenna Dewan-Tatum and Emily Deschanel. Hailing from Canada, the digestive health and hormone specialist's career was inspired by his family's own health issues. After having spent a lot of his time in hospitals by the age of 17, Dave became very interested in disease prevention and as



such, he has also worked with cancer and HIV patients.

Perhaps it's this personal interest that makes him so passionate about his mission, and within minutes of meeting the man whose clients dub him a "physique transformation specialist," I was already fascinated by his views into my lifestyle. First, I discovered my body type, and I'm not talking about your usual fruit-related comparison that tells you if you're an apple or pear shape.

According to Dave, there are three basic body types: Endomorph, Ectomorph and

Mesomorph. "Do you have any friends that can eat whatever they want and they just never seem to gain any weight? Well, they're Ectomorphs," he said, explaining the characteristics of each type. I soon discover that my ability to easily put on muscle, my hourglass shape of wider shoulders and hips with a narrow waist, and an overall naturally athletic frame, mean that I'm a mesomorph, a type shared with many of the world's leading figure skaters. That must explain why I have such a penchant for skater dresses then, I decide, and I soon learn

that understanding what body type you are is the first key in creating a programme that can target your body's unique way of storing fat, putting on muscle, and generally reacting to various types of exercise and food. A quick session with some dreaded callipers tells me that I'm at a pretty healthy level of body fat, but why, then, is it that I constantly struggle with what feels like an abnormal level of excess fat around my belly and hips, especially considering my healthy diet and regular workouts? It's all down to my pesky hormones, apparently, and, after an analysis of my dietary habits, I was prescribed a combination of natural supplements and vitamins to help me balance out my cortisol and oestrogen levels, so that my metabolism can function at its

BY THE BOOK

If you're looking to make a change and achieve your best possible body when it comes to your diet, nutrition and overall health, Dave says the following four factors are key:

- 1) Controlling insulin
- 2) Improving digestive health
- 3) Enhancing metabolism
- 4) Optimising hormones

While every individual should seek what works best for their body, some foods that are best to avoid in general include: Soy milk, refined sugar, non-organic dairy, and processed wheat.





best. I couldn't wait to get home and put them to the test.

The Sweat Life

Now that my body was taken care of from the inside, it was time to focus on getting more lean and strong. Unfortunately, my hectic lifestyle means it's not always easy to fit in as many workouts as I'd like, which is why I was glad to see Dave's programme focused on HIIT to help me achieve great results in as little time as possible. We began with a tabata workout on day one, a form of high intensity interval training that originated in Japan. On day two, it was time for an intensive legs and booty session, before we moved on to work my upper body and abs, and add in some heavier weights and strength training on the following days. With each workout, I could already feel myself growing stronger, able to push myself harder each day—all while sweating buckets in the often roasting Maldivian sunshine. While the workouts were undoubtably challenging, I was thrilled to find that they put such little pressure on my joints (the fact that Dave is

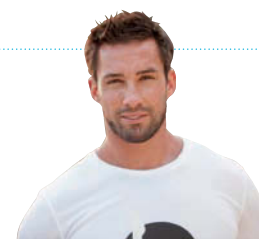
DAVE'S DETOX SHOT

Want to cleanse your system? Try Dave's classic detox shot, which he recommends you take each day in the morning before breakfast, and again later in the afternoon or evening. To make it, mix together the following, adjusting the water and spices based on whether you prefer a "spicier" shot or a taller drink:

- 1/2 lemon, squeezed to juice
- 50-150ml water
- 125mg turmeric
- 50mg cayenne pepper
- 10mg black pepper
- 100mg chlorella

intent on ensuring proper form helped immensely) that I was never too sore to give it my all the next day, even with the deliciously satisfying DOMS I woke up to each morning. As I can't always make it to the gym, Dave also suggested some great moves I could do with nothing more than a mat and some body weight from the comfort of my own home for the days where even heading out is too difficult. The idea of balancing out your intensive workouts with a few strategically-planned massages is often too pricey to handle in everyday life, but Coco Palm's spa offers such affordable rates that here, it was entirely

possible, and I looked forward to my daily massages from my head to my toes as much as I did my workouts. During my downtime, I spent my days on the ocean: The resort offers plenty of excursions from fishing (Bonus: They'll cook what you catch!), dolphin watching, snorkelling, diving, kayaking, sailing, and windsurfing, with paddleboarding soon to be added to the list. At mealtimes, grilled fresh reef fish with sauteed vegetables and sweet potato became a fast favourite, and a reminder that eating healthy is often best when dishes are kept simple. Loneliness was never an issue, with plenty to keep my days full. By the time I returned home, my muscles feeling tighter and my insides feeling lighter, topped off with sun-kissed skin and a genuinely relaxed vibe that saw me sleep better than I had in months, I felt like a new woman. What better way was there to spend a solo vacation? Going on holiday alone, especially to a retreat like this one, could be one of the best gifts you ever give to yourself, and I couldn't recommend it enough. ■



MEET DAVE

Dave Catudal is a celebrity fitness trainer, certified nutrition consultant, and international health educator who has dedicated the last 14 years of his life to wellness and optimising human performance. From professional athletes, top models and Hollywood celebrities, to busy parents and professionals, Dave has helped thousands of people to realise their holistic wellness and aesthetic physical goals. He is the author of *The Physique Transformation Book—A Complete Guide to Optimal Health and a Better Body*. His methods of teaching involve an emphasis on the importance of organic nutrition and creating a more active and balanced lifestyle, while incorporating positive thinking and stress reduction techniques to complement the mind-body connection. To find out more, visit TrainToTransform.com, or visit his new site, TranzendBody.com, set to launch this month.