

Paradise islands must close their health spas after Islamists claim they're 'offensive'

Written by Daily Mail
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Thousands of honeymoons will never be the same again after Islamists put pressure on the Maldives government to close them down.

The islands are a paradise holiday destination renowned for its pristine white sand beaches, turquoise waters and high-end luxury.

Honeymooners and celebrities from around the world flock there, often paying up to \$1,000 a night at hideaway resorts.



Banned: Massage sessions like this at The Huvafen Fushi Spa in the Maldives were deemed offensive

But now officials in the Maldives have ruled the Indian Ocean archipelago's luxury spas, health centres and massage parlours must close.

The government has relented after sustained pressure from radical Islamist opposition parties claiming they were offensive.

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Tourists flock to the Maldives to enjoy the luxury resorts and explore the Indian Ocean. Here a diver swims underwater at Meemu Atoll

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CuravaOne of the Maldives resorts that were available at the Four Seasons resort at Landaa

TOP THREE HOTELS TO 'LOSE THEIR LUSTRE'

One & Only Reethi Rah

This chic resort located on one of the biggest islands in the North Male Atoll is still top dog in the Maldives. It offers the height of luxury and privacy for its guests and attracts a jet-set crowd for whom money is no object.

Cost: Reethi Rah is home to 130 luxurious private beach and water villas. Prices start at £959 per room per night in January.

Spa: The spa is one of the highlights of the resort. It features crystal steam rooms and ice fountains and signature treatments include a volcanic hot stone massage and an exfoliating scrub that promises a sun-kissed glow.

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Soneva Gili

The stunning wooden villas at this popular eco resort will bring out the Robinson Crusoe in you - they're all built over water and have direct access to the resort's lagoon. Plus, everything is open to the elements and the villas have all been built using only natural fibres.

Cost: Soneva Gili offers just 45 villas. Each has its own private water garden and sun deck and cost from £685 per night in January.

Spa: The resort's Six Senses Spa boasts glass floor-panels and an extensive a la carte treatment menu. Treatments range from a 90-minute coconut body scrub to an 'Asian Fusion Journey' which lasts nearly six hours and includes three different massages.

Huvafen Fushi

Set within its very own lagoon, this resort boasts pristine white beaches, friendly staff and laid-back minimalism.

Cost: Each of the over-water bungalows at the resort features a private pool and prices start from £1160 per bungalow per night in January.

Spa: The cutting-edge underwater spa rooms are a major selling point for the resort and certainly have the wow factor. Tropical fish float past large windows as you indulge in treatments such as Unite Me Crystal Ritual, which involves an application of a sand and lime poultice and a coconut oil massage.

It has led to fear the £1 billion tourism sector in the Maldives will suffer.

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The country's president issued the decree on Saturday, saying the idea came from opposition parties angry at widespread sales of pork and alcohol.

Importation of alcohol is already severely prohibited in the Maldives and Islamists are now calling for a complete ban.

The Maldives is a mainly Sunni Muslim nation of more than 1,200 atolls housing a population of 400,000.

'The government has decided to close massage parlors and spas in the Maldives, following an opposition-led religious protest last week calling for their closure,' President Mohamed Nasheed's office said in a statement.

'Ironically, the same opposition leaders who railed against spas and the selling of alcohol and pork to tourists are some of the country's biggest resort owners.'

However, former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's opposition coalition Progressive Party of Maldives said the government move was aimed at leisure business owned by some opposition members.

'We never asked for the ban,' PPM spokesman Ahamed Mahloof said. 'We wanted the liquor and massage clinics banned in inhabited islands to prevent prostitution and spread of drugs and alcohol to locals.'

'Nasheed is misusing the demands to take revenge by imposing the ban on resorts owned by the opposition members.'

The Four Seasons Resort at Kuda Huras in the Maldives charges \$600 for a two-and-a-half

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hour spa treatment, according to the resort's website.

Other resorts also charge similar amounts. The country's tourism minister said the move has already prompted calls from resorts affected.

'Several have raised concerns over our decision. We are considering allowing resorts to operate spas. They are also aware of the reasons that led us to take the decision,' Tourism Minister Mariyam Zulfa said.