



SEAPLANE REQUIRED

↑ The St. Regis Maldives Vommuli's John Jacob Astor Estate is an overwater mansion of epic proportions.

 THE MALDIVES



↑ Soneva Jani claims nearly 150 acres of pristine Maldivian island and sea. →

A trip to the

Maldives is never a bad idea. But this year, the tropical wonder in the middle of the Indian Ocean offers more than a few new excuses to book an island-hopping adventure. In November, the **St. Regis Maldives Vommuli Resort** (stregismaldives.com) made a splash as the most luxurious hotel opening in recent memory. The 22-acre isle brought all the requisite Maldivian frills—infinity-edge pools, haute cuisine, a sprawling spa. We were most

captivated, however, by the John Jacob Astor Estate, an over-the-top overwater bungalow that's said to be the island nation's largest and—with a private spa, theater, and 300-foot-long swimming pool—most luxurious.

By year's end, the St. Regis had some stiff competition:

Soneva Jani (soneva.com) rolled out the red (and green) carpet with 24 eco-luxe villas—some with water-slides, others with retractable roofs, and all with private swimming pools. And in the Baa Atoll UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, both the barefoot-chic **Milaidhoo Island** (milaidhoo.com) and the exclusive-use **Four Seasons Maldives Private Island at Voavah** (fourseasons.com) made their debuts. The cast of castaway fantasies will continue to grow later this year with the arrival of an opulent Italian-Maldivian mash-up of a resort from **Baglioni Hotels** (baglionihotels.com).
—Leslie Patrick



SONEVA JANI (LEFT): RICHARD WAITE