

HELLO!

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ON TOUR IN SINGAPORE WILLIAM AND KATE



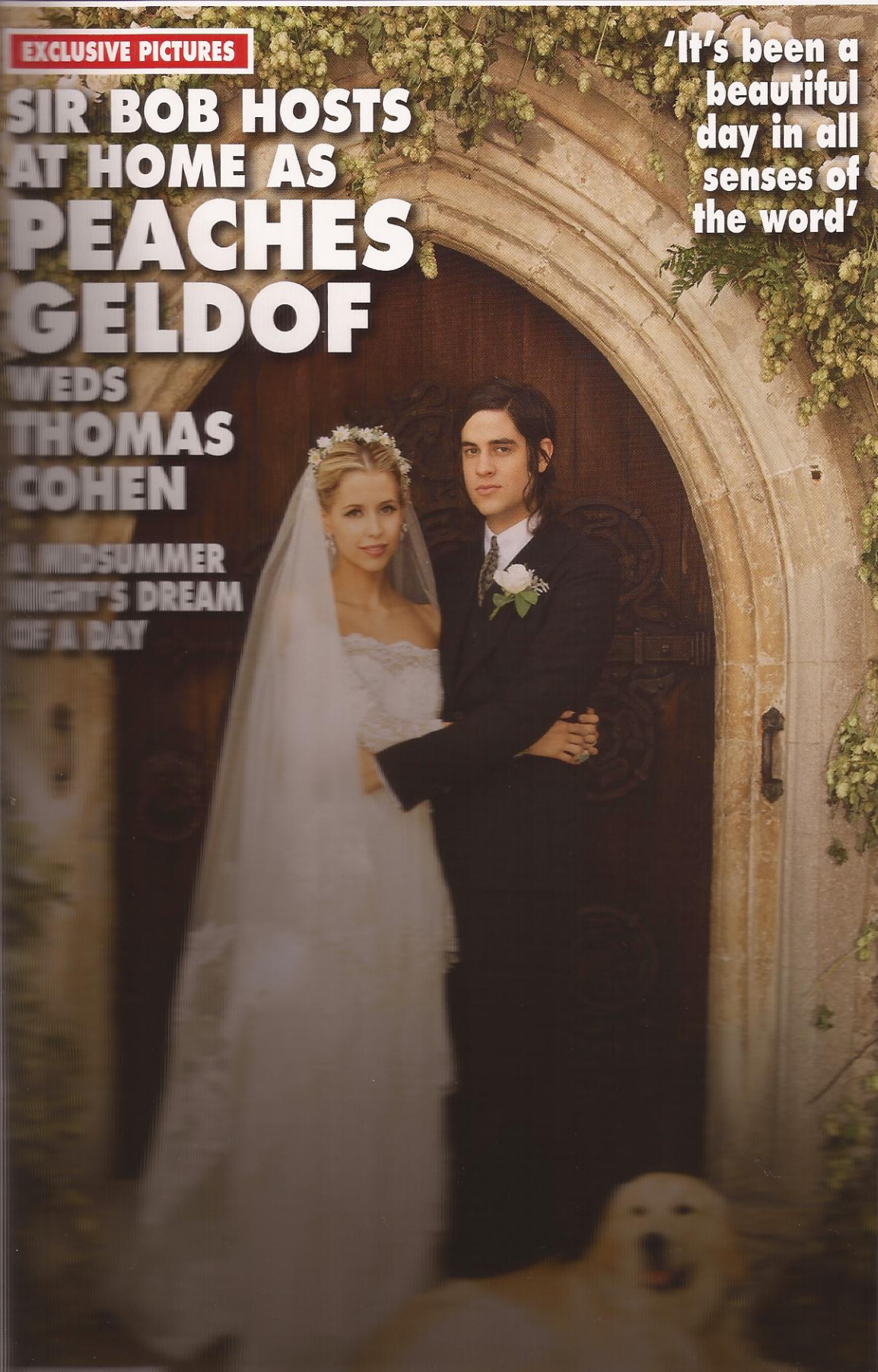
EXCLUSIVE PICTURES

SIR BOB HOSTS AT HOME AS PEACHES GELDOF

WEDS THOMAS COHEN

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM OF A DAY

'It's been a beautiful day in all senses of the word'




FASHION WEEK FROM THE FRONT



WEDDING SURPRISE BLAKE AND RYAN

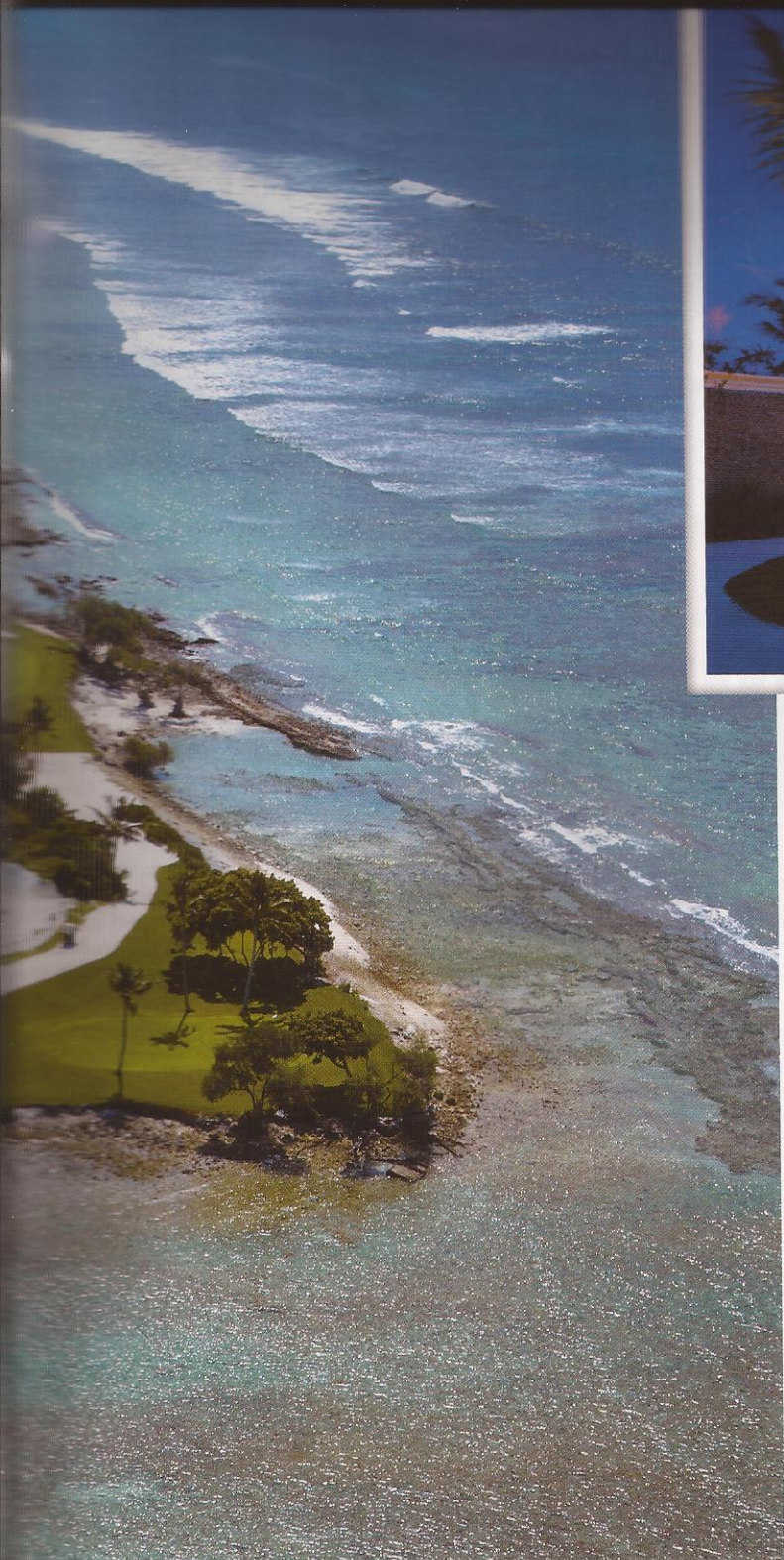




Paradise found



There are a precious few things in life that live up to the marketing hype, but the Shangri-La Villingili Resort makes it happen. HELLO! explores the atolls of this divine destination

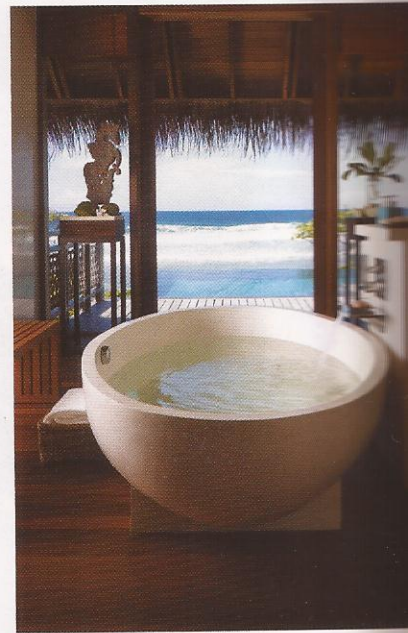


And relax... The resort weaves itself beautifully into the local landscape. Restaurant dining areas are perched on the edge of breaking waves while the accommodation includes tree house villas which are hidden amongst the treetops. There's also a Chef's Garden to grow some of the ingredients for delicious culinary concoctions

STAYCATIONS IN HEAVEN

Arriving at the Shangri-La's Villingili Resort & Spa is an experience in itself. HELLO! flew to Gan, and as with most domestic flights from Malé to any of the atolls, your nose will be pressed up against the window of the plane marvelling at the lie of the islands, which form an intricate mosaic pattern of turquoise colours.

From Gan, a five minute speedboat ride, complete with coconut welcome drink and cold towel, saw us disembarking at the main pier of the resort, where we were greeted, as all guests are, by the general manager. We were then whisked away by our private butler to our beach villa and it was a cacophony of 'oohs' and 'aahs' at the beauty of the surroundings. From the endless stretch of white sandy beaches to the swaying palm trees which mingled naturally with coral reefs easily visible ▶



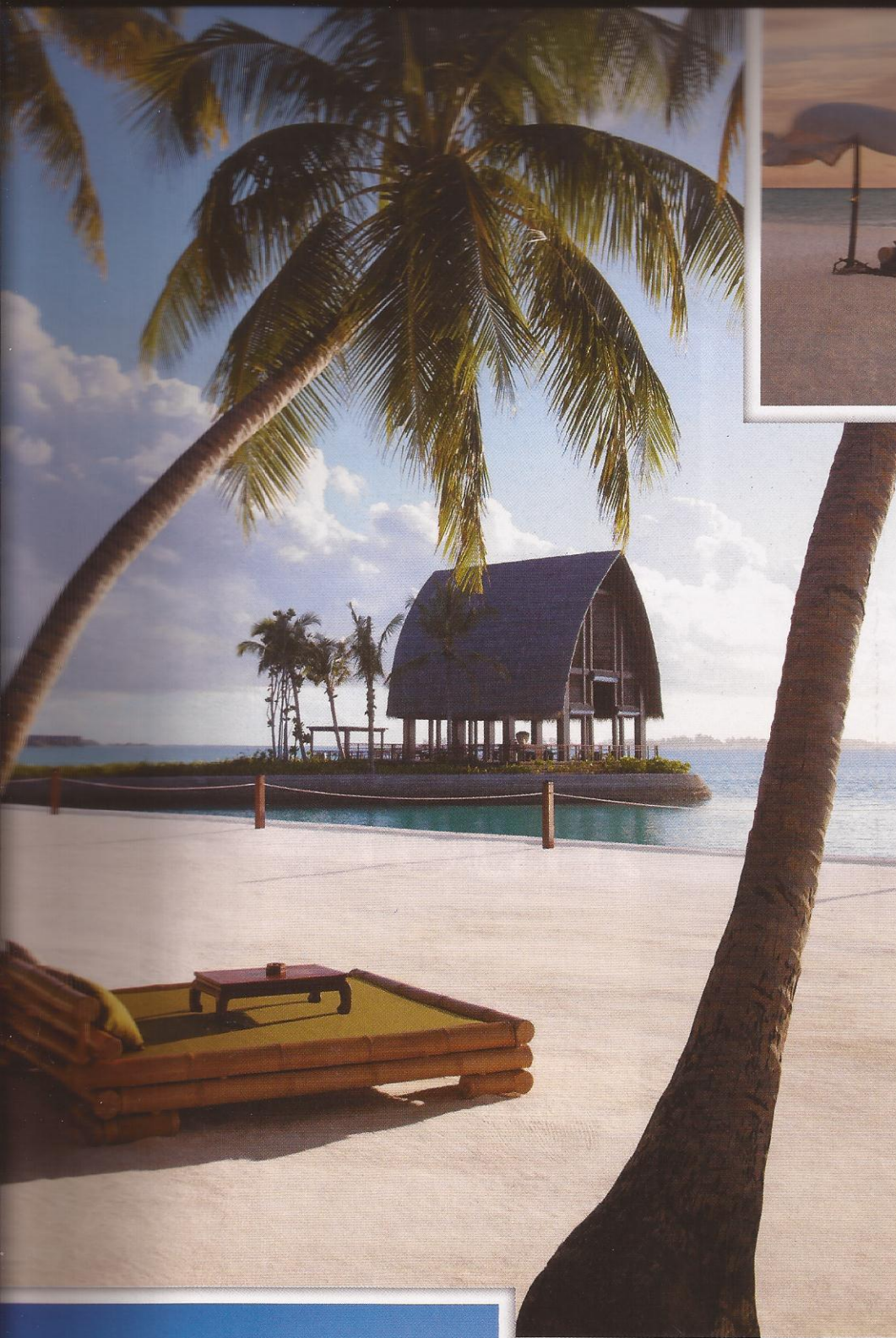
Every year, we sit down and make a list of our holiday hotspots. We choose between flying east or west, relaxing beaches or adrenaline-fueled adventure, a new city or the familiarity of home comforts. As a result, we all have a list of destinations that we have told ourselves that we must see – a bucket list if you will – and if the Maldives isn't on it, then it most definitely should be, if only for the fact that this stunning country may no longer exist by the end of our lifetime due to rising sea levels.

The Maldives is a group of over 1,100 islands divided into 26 regions known as atolls, located approximately three and a half hours south east of Dubai. It is the lowest lying country in the world, sitting at an average of just 1.5 metres above sea level. The capital

city, and home to its international airport, is Malé which has a population of just over 100,000 people – to put that into perspective, nearly 85 times as many tourists visit the Maldives every year. It is relatively easy to travel from the UAE, with both Emirates Airlines and Etihad Airways offering direct flights and a number of transit options available.

Unless you are very curious or have a scheduling hiccup, you are unlikely to spend any time in the Maldivian capital, with the allure of the luxury resorts enticing the majority of the tourists. Upon arrival, you will most likely be whisked off onto a speed boat or a small plane to your hotel, which can be up to 90 minutes away if you are staying on one of the southern atolls.





Drink it in: The Maldives takes you by the hand and tells you it's okay to not want to do anything today, and you agree

The resort weaves itself beautifully into the local landscape. Restaurant dining areas are perched on the edge of breaking waves while the accommodation includes tree house villas which are hidden amongst the treetops. There's also a Chef's Garden to grow some of the ingredients for its delicious culinary concoctions.

With options ranging from pool villas and water villas to the magnificent presidential Villa Laalu which even includes its own spa, you can choose from a variety of accommodation depending on where you want to be, whom you want to be seen by and how much you want to spend. Each guest is also provided with a bicycle that can be used to explore the island. There are a number of entertainment options too, that include movie nights, snorkeling expeditions, dolphin watching and watersports. Little tots are kept occupied in the daycare centre and children's club.

For the grown ups, CHI the spa, with its ocean front position and individual private treatment rooms, is a must visit for the ultimate relaxation. Individual outdoor pavilions overlooking the turquoise waters allow the sea breeze to gently refresh as you do your morning yoga or enjoy a healthy meal post treatment.

The spa menu here is extensive and included signature treatments exclusive to the Maldivian resort. **HELLO!** took the option of the Signature Kandu Boli Ritual with Kandu Boli being the local name for 'seashell'. The shells are first warmed and then used to massage the entire body, which is so soothing, you may struggle to stay awake. An indulging 90 minutes long, the treatment started with a cleansing coconut foot wash and scrub and ended with an incredible head massage before heading to the alfresco relaxation area to simply enjoy the gardens and ocean views.

Great food, relaxed entertainment and a choice of leisure activities undoubtedly make up a major part of a fantastic stay. Expect the team here to make every effort to ensure your needs are met. By the second day, they already knew how we took our coffee and where we would likely want to have lunch.

BACK TO REALITY

It was with no small amount of murmured regrets that **HELLO!** got back on that speedboat to make the seemingly endless journey home. Not normally the type of people to go back to the same destination twice, the Maldives would definitely be an exception.

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through the crystal clear waters, the whole effect bordered on the surreal and had us reaching for the camera every 30 seconds.

The pace of life in the Maldives is a delightful juxtaposition to the daily grind. Island time seems to amble by at a pace which is content to be just a little bit behind everyone else. It takes you by the hand and tells you it's okay to not want to do anything today, and you agree.

BASKING IN BLISS

The Shangri-La Villingili Resort & Spa itself is sublime and is a 47.5 hectare piece of paradise with four restaurants, two bars, a cycling trail, dive centre, a little village and the Maldives' only golf course. It was easy to see why the resort had been selected by Spanish *Elle* and Russian *Glamour* for recent photo shoots as well as being the spot used to shoot the H&M summer campaign of 2012.

WORDS: KAREN OSMAN