

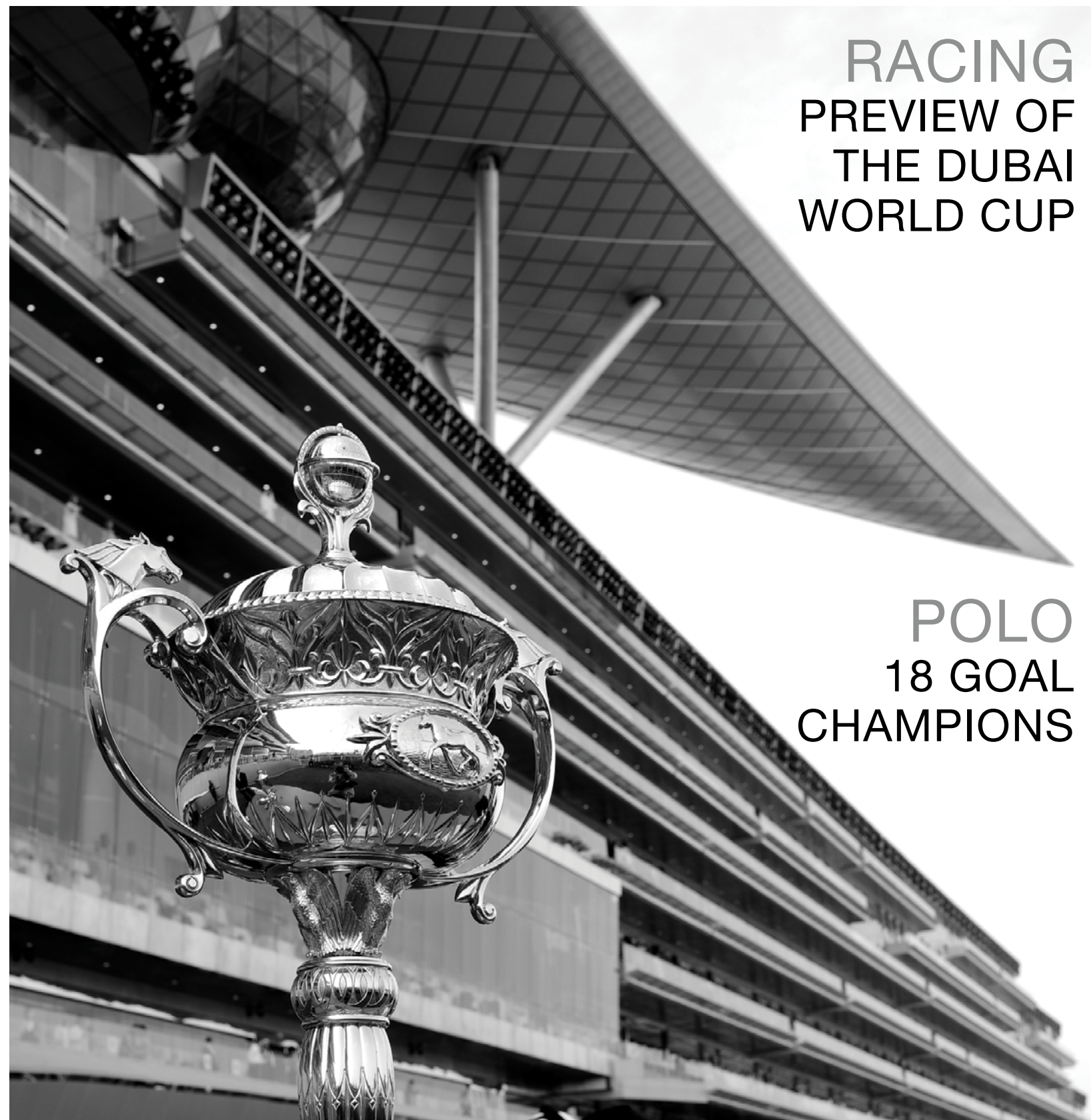
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EQUESTRIO

POLO RACING LIFESTYLE

RACING
PREVIEW OF
THE DUBAI
WORLD CUP

POLO
18 GOAL
CHAMPIONS



VELAA PRIVATE ISLAND, THE MALDIVES

PARADISE. FOUND.

LOOKING FOR AN ESCAPE TO THE ULTIMATE IN LUXURY AND ADVENTURE? VELAA MAY
EASILY BE THE ANSWER. THEY'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Courtesy of Velaa Private Island



What does paradise mean to you? According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is “an ideal or idyllic place or state”. Maybe luxury refers simply to time where in our moment-poor, hectic lives, we struggle to find space for ourselves; or perhaps it is reserved for occasions spent with friends and family; or maybe it’s hours spent in an exquisite restaurant with caviar on tap, and red velvet seats to nestle into.

They are all very amiable explanations of luxury, but I believe I have found the true definition of the word: Velaa private island in the Maldives.

The atolls of the Maldives have long-been a wish list destination. Talc-soft sands, azure waters, perfect Robinson Crusoe-style islands to wash up on and recharge. There are resorts dotted all over this stretch of the Indian Ocean but Velaa stands heads and shoulders over the rest.

Why?

It’s all in the details.

The project is from Czech businessman, Jiri Smejck whose wife fell in love with the Maldives during their honeymoon. Returning to the islands on a regular basis they decided to create their own slice of heaven and carved out such a place on the shores of Velaa. Calling on architect and designer Petr Kolar, they created an island ideal that includes Maldivian

influences but is all together slicker, chicer and boasts that je ne sais quoi that makes it extraordinary.

Velaa – meaning turtle island in the local language – draws on these influences. You’ll find the tortishell-like tones of the mahogany and teak woods take their cue from the turtle’s shells, whilst the blue and turquoise notes are like a watercolour paintbox directly from the ocean.

There are high-tech aspects to appeal to the media-savvy age with iPads updated with daily newspapers and the goings-on of the island, and iPhone-style tablets to call your villa butler should you need anything – from diving times and snorkel kit, to room service and a replenish of the Clarins products.

For the adventurous, there are numerous water toys including a submarine – yes, you read that correctly – to a bobcat, from a catamaran to paddleboards. There are diving excursions to barely explored reefs in the Noonu atoll where grey-tipped sharks and graceful eagle rays swim amongst the rainbow coral, and trips out on either the island’s luxury yacht or the more traditional Maldivian Bahtheli.

On land, you can improve your golf swing on the nine tee, professional green complete with all the latest gadgetry; go for early morning tennis practices or indulge in private yoga sunrise salutations. ▶





For the foodies there are options galore. Although it's difficult to leave the comfort and seclusion of your villa and spoiling yourself with room service, there is so much to indulge in. Have lazy breakfasts at Athiri – at least one time order the eggs benedict with truffle shavings; they're heavy on the truffle – and cocktails at Avi with the accompaniment of flickering torch light in the sands and an in-house DJ or live band. Head to Tavaru, the tallest building in the Maldives, to discover the grape cellar or assail your senses with an evening spent at the signature restaurant, Aragu.

And for those who like nothing more than to lay-back and feel restored, spend days, literally *ddaaaayyyys* at the Spa by Clarins. They boast the only snow room in the Atolls – perfect for rushing into simply for novelty value – and the extraordinary Wolke 7 Cloud 9 where cloud-shaped reclining treatment pods by Klaf and perception researcher, Sha slowly sway and cradle

guests into deep relaxation. The exclusive My Blend facial products and body treatments are totally personalised and make you feel a million dollars. At this spa out on stilts into the lagoon, you truly 'breathe in the beauty of Velaa'.

It's difficult to pin-point just one truly special moment for my time spent on Velaa. To mention each and every detail and every 'this-can't-be-real' moment would turn this article into nothing short of a novel, but I'll share one quick story.

Having landed only a short while in paradise, we decided to head to the Athiri restaurant for lunch. Opting for a table planted in a cool stream with my toes playing in the water, we ordered fresh ceviche and delectable oysters paired with pinkest grape. Sitting in quiet contemplation, we looked out onto our view of the main infinity pool with its contemporary white loungers and out onto the ocean. Just beyond the jetty and arrival pavilion, two dolphins leapt out of the water, swimming their way around the island. Not following the wake of a yacht, they were simply joyously meandering through the water – and only adding to the 'pinch-me' moments of time spent in this truly special place.

You can pick from private one-bedroomed beach villas, or opt for a thatched roof pad out on stilts in the surrounding shallows. There are four-bedroomed palatial residences perfect for families or a fun group of friends or go ultra-romantic and stay with The One out at the romantic pool residence only accessible via boat.

Luxury to me, is burying my toes in the white sand, looking out from my private villa to waters only disturbed by the lapping wing-like fins of the feeding rays and the last of the sun kissing the shores of Velaa. Paradise found. **E**

NEED TO KNOW: www.velaaprivateisland.com

