

MALDIVES

Volume: 02
February 2021

TOURISM BULLETIN



HIGHLIGHTS

News and events from industry

CONVERSATIONS

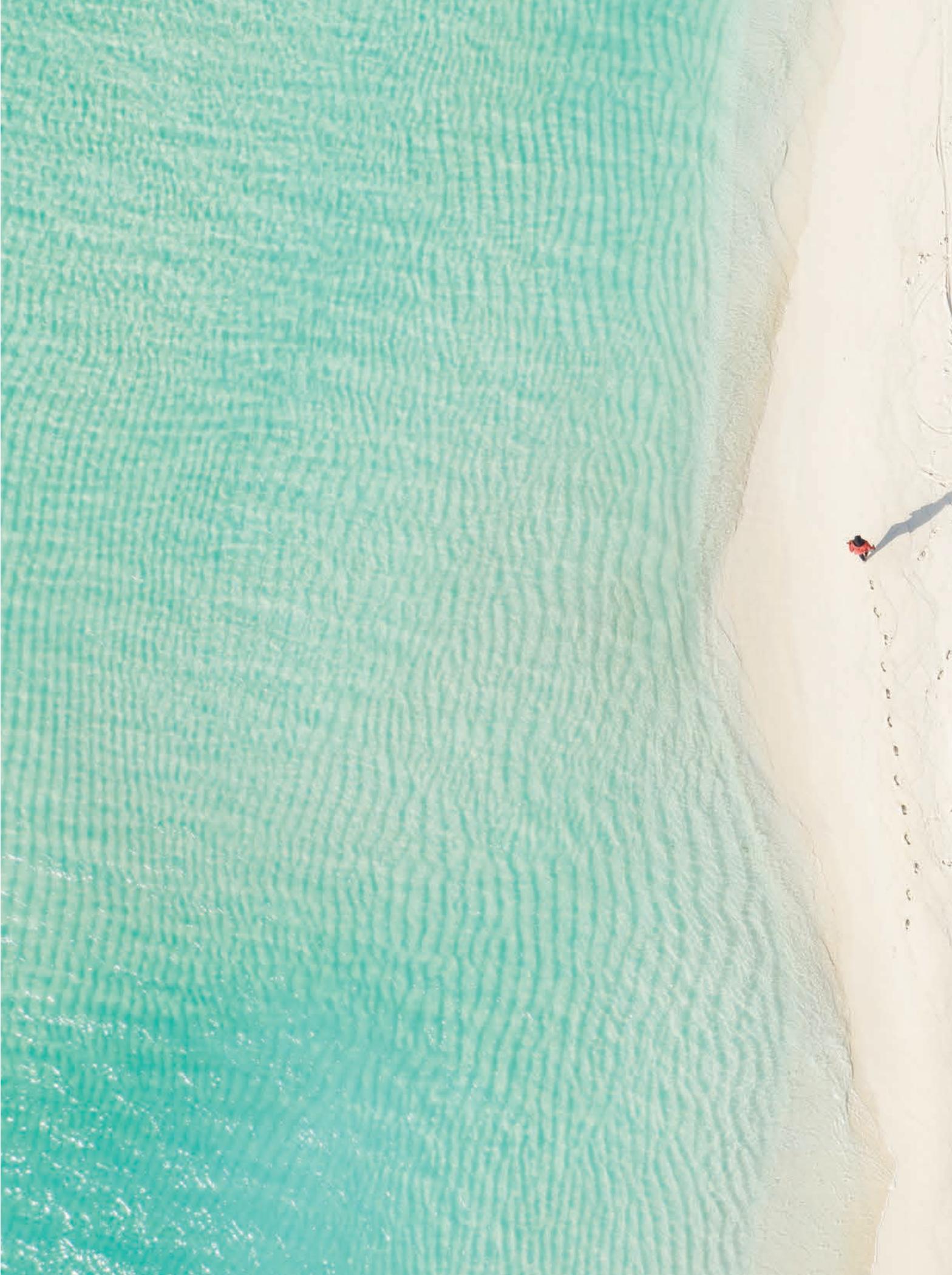
Prominent personalities, promising faces

UPDATES

Trends, market updates & tourist facilities



MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES





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AN OVERVIEW OF THE 10TH AMENDMENT TO THE TOURISM ACT

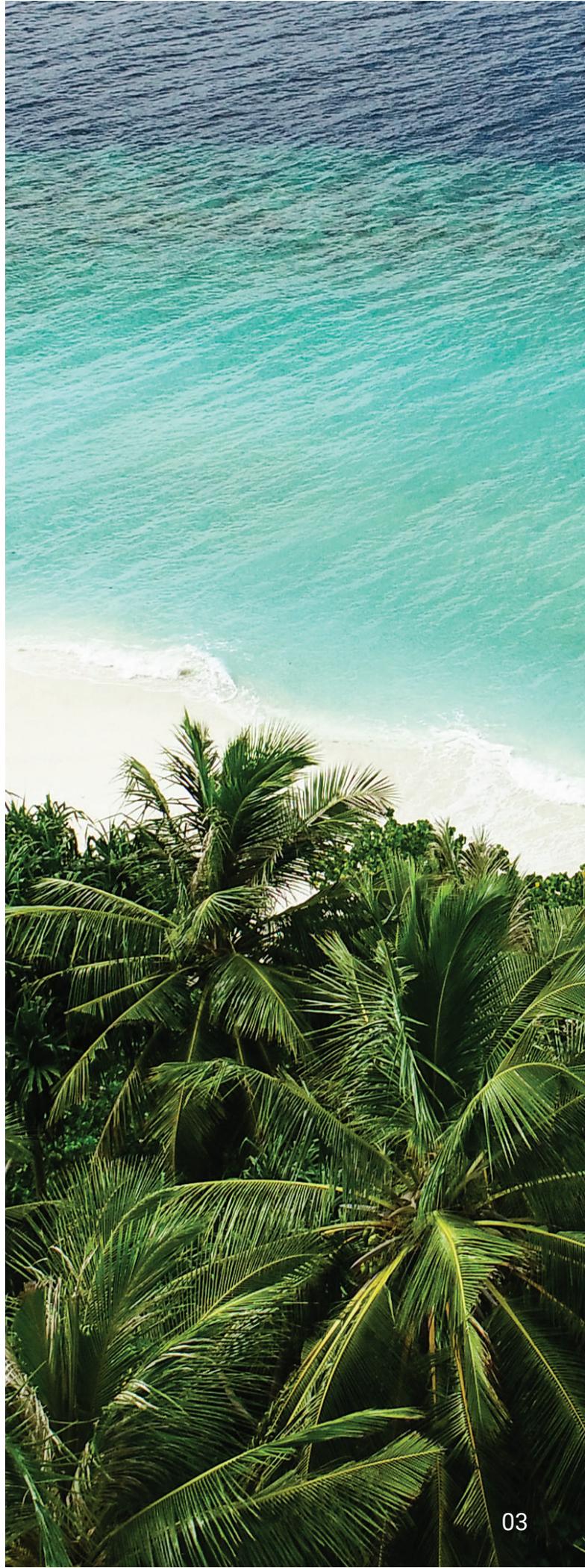
By: Mohamed Khussan

The 10th Amendment to the Tourism Act has brought some long overdue revisions to the provisions of the tourism act which first came into effect in 1999. The landscape of the tourism industry has changed amid the rapid expansion of tourism in the country and these amendments provide us with the requisite legal framework for introducing new products and regulating the burgeoning industry. The amendments also contain provisions required to facilitate the decentralization of development of local tourism by empowering local councils to zone land for tourism and lease them without intervention by the Ministry as envisioned by the government manifestos.

Additional changes center on administrative changes with regard to leasing of islands, lagoons and plots of lands for tourism development. One key change is the facilitation of extension of leases with a period of less than 50 years. This was initially facilitated by the 2nd Amendment to the Tourism Act in 2010, however this was restricted by the subsequent 4th Amendment to the Tourism Act in 2014 and further by the 8th Amendment to the Tourism Act in 2016 with an in force limitation on further applications and the setting of 31st December 2017 as a deadline for lease extension payments and the cancellation of lease extension contracts in case of default on payments by the deadline. Further changes to the lease extension regime have doubled the fees for lease extension subject to a 2 year grace period.

A major change brought forth by the 10th Amendment to the Tourism Act is the differentiation of lease rent for land leased out for tourism development across different regions of the country as well as between uninhabited islands or lagoons and inhabited islands. These changes will drive forth investment in regions with limited tourism development in the far south and north of the country. The distance from the main international airport, local geography, available infrastructure and current developments have been taken into account in determining rent across the regions. Further, as a general rule, the lease rent for lands leased from inhabited islands has been set at half that of uninhabited islands or lagoons in that region.

The other major changes center on the introduction of new products and establishing the legal framework for developing and regulating these new products. A legal





framework for integrated tourism has been introduced. This gives a developer the right to sublease smaller plots of land from a single lease to develop multiple tourist properties whilst maintaining common facilities. This gives rise to the concept of establishing multiple tourist resorts on a single island or a mix of facilities. Additionally, the facilitation of lease extensions and the possibility of developing multiple tourist establishments open up new possibilities for completing the development of stagnant leases and accelerate the economic recovery from the devastation of COVID-19.

Further additions to the product line are the real estate products which have been outlined in the 10th Amendment to the Tourism Act. These products are long term leasehold villas or standalone rooms in tourist establishments and private islands. Villa leases have to date been allowed under a regulation, however, the enshrining of rights of leaseholders in legislation will drive investor confidence and establish this as a lucrative segment for the tourism industry. Private islands are envisioned as a real estate product targeted towards the super wealthy and will drive increases in government revenue.

Other changes to the Tourism Act allow for the sublease or severing of leases for separate islands located within a single lease. Additionally, a formula for calculating the price of the Government's shares in joint venture companies established to lease islands under a former provision in the Tourism Act has been enshrined in legislation with this amendment. This sets the price of government shares in these joint venture companies at 5 US Dollars per square meter of land leased for tourism development to the said company per percentage of shares held by the government. A further change exempts foreign flagged seagoing tourist vessels under 15m length from being charged a fee for cruising in Maldivian waters. Finally, determination of the length of operating licenses issued by the Ministry has been removed from the provisions set forth in the Tourism Act and allows the Ministry flexibility in issuing operating licenses. Furthermore, the possibility of issuing lengthier operating licenses as compared to the 5 year term earlier set forth by the Tourism Act will increase financing opportunities for tourist establishments.

Mr. Mohamed Khussan is the Senior Policy Director of the Ministry of Tourism and is currently overseeing the Legal Affairs Section

VISIT MALDIVES - JOURNEY OF 2020

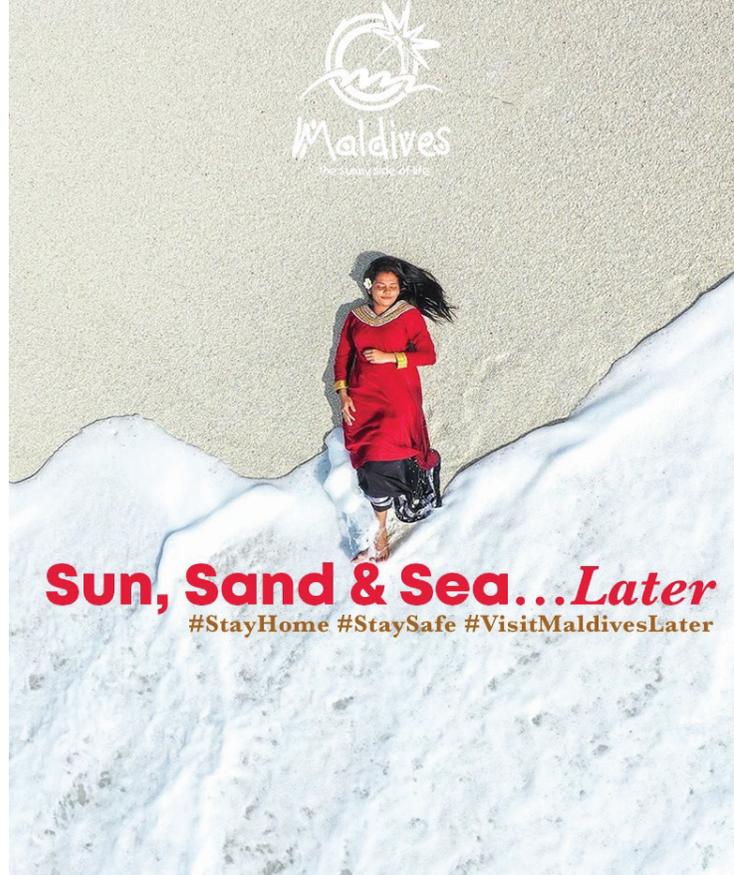
By: Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation

With the backdrop of 1.7 million tourist arrivals in 2019, 2020 began with ambitious plans to reach a new milestone of 2 million tourist arrivals by the end of the year. Our key source markets were looking good, despite the growth of the Chinese markets leveling off. The Indian market surpassed all expectations and our traditional Europe markets were showing consistent annual growth after several years. In spite of the disturbing news of a rapidly spreading virus in China, we ended January with a 14% increase. What happened next, as we all know, has taken us through a journey of uncertainty to where we are today.

The crisis that hit us was unprecedented. However, if past experience was anything to go by, we had faith in the industry's ability to bounce back as soon as it was given a chance to do so. What we needed was unrelenting marketing to suit the situation before us. The campaigns planned for the year were disrupted, so our priority during the early days was on maintaining our brand and sustaining the unique position we had gained. Thus, we re-strategized and within days, the campaigns were shifted online, with our staff working from home.

Our "Visit Later" campaign, which launched during the first few weeks, was focused on ensuring Maldives remained at the top of the mind for those dreaming of travel, offering content for people to see and dream about the Maldives. At the same time, we made sure we took all the opportunities available for us to take part in online forums with international tourism organizations and partners, to get a grip on how things were evolving. We kept in touch with industry stakeholders, getting their views on ways to move forward, and we moved ahead with a host of online activities. During the four months of lockdown, we conducted 314 B2B and B2C activities across various online platforms.

By April, we were planning on how we were going to relaunch our marketing to suit a post-pandemic world of travel. We worked on various scenarios that could unfold and planned in advance to adapt our activities to suit those scenarios. It was quite obvious that we would have to factor in communicating the measures we have taken at public touch points such as airports and social distancing in domestic air, sea and land transfers in order to assure potential visitors of a safe passage to their resorts. Maldives is fortunate to have been endowed with our unique natural geography and we planned to capitalize on that aspect effectively, to promote the Maldives as a safe destination.

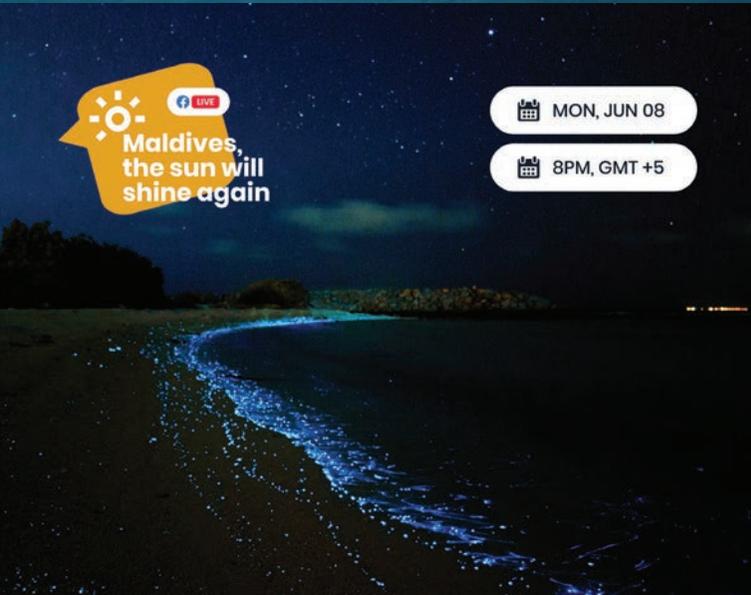


On 15th July 2020, we opened our borders 110 days after they were closed. It was a bold move by the President of Maldives, Honorable Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. To be the first country to do so, offered Maldives a massive advantage that demonstrated our confidence to the global travel market. It was an opportunity to cater to the pent-up need to escape from the stress of being under lockdown. With that we launched "Rediscover Maldives", inviting people around the world to relive the happiness and to rejoice in the sun. Simultaneously we ran our "safe destination" messaging, emphasizing on the measures that are in place and the freedom visitors have in the Maldives, which would enable them to enjoy and have fun like nowhere else in the world.

Our marketing efforts are continuing without pause. Since we opened our borders in July, we have conducted 412 B2C and B2B activities on online and offline platforms in various target markets.

Looking at our major markets, China is still not open for travel and the pandemic is still not at a safe level of control in India. Our key European markets are still under various degrees of restrictions. In spite of all that, we have reached a level of success that none of us would have dared to dream just a couple of months ago.

We have continued to retain the key theme we have developed, and our current strategy is to conduct targeted marketing at source markets from which people can travel. The intensive media campaign that took place in November and December covered 14



countries, reaching 22,822,144 on digital platforms, alternatively reaching offline readership audiences of 5,808,525 and a total circulation of 1,976,369. The campaign is wide reaching, with media selected in target source markets that will reach out to various market segments.

For 2021, our strategies will focus on promoting the Maldives brand under an umbrella that unifies the various options visitors have for their stay in Maldives. Promotions will target key market segments that look for various experiences. Rejuvenation of traditional source markets is also one of our strategies for the year, with the aim of creating new appeal for the Maldives for the younger generations in countries such as Italy and Germany. We are looking at expanding regional tourism and will work to revive the momentum we had in the Indian market for both the luxury segment, as well as for guesthouse experiences.

The objective of achieving the perfect balance between offline and online activities is entwined in our global and market specific strategies for 2021. We will continue to develop various channels on social media and enrich our content. The synergy we have built through our engagement with travel agents and tour operators around the world will continue and we will develop effective partnerships with international travel and tourism stakeholders for focused joint promotional activities in specific source markets.

As a destination we can take pride in our achievements during the year. Winning the “World’s Leading Destination” Award is a success that the industry can be proud of. And there is more in our chest of achievement and accolades for the year; the Airport Health Accreditation for Velana International from the Airport Council International and the “Safe Travels Stamp” from the World Tourism and Travel Council are testament to the efforts of various stakeholders of the industry. The Maldives Border Miles program launched during the year is exceptional and has been lauded as one of the most innovative moves by a country’s tourism industry by CNN Travel.

Our hopes for 2021 are immense and our aim is to continue working together with the government and all industry stakeholders, unifying our efforts to bring Maldives back to a pre-pandemic state, and reach 1.5 million tourist arrivals by the end of the year.

*Safe Haven surrounded by
pristine blue waters*



*Fly from the Middle East to the
Maldives via Emirates, Etihad Airways,
Qatar Airways and Fly Dubai*

REDISCOVER
Maldives *..the sunny side of life*

 **Maldives**
..the sunny side of life



TOURISM ISLAND HULHUMALE': A Beacon of Economic Diversification in the Maldives

By: Housing Development Corporation



island's land connectivity to Velana International Airport and Male' city, it is perfectly positioned in all aspects to serve as a convenient island getaway for visitors, as an attractive investment opportunity for local and global developers and most importantly, as a promising economic opportunity for our community".

FROM AN AWARD-WINNING URBAN MASTERPLAN

The city of Hulhumalé was initially reclaimed and developed to provide housing solutions to meet the demands of the growing population concentrated in the capital region of the Maldives. This urban development project is undertaken by the state-owned Housing Development Corporation (HDC). With a global award-winning Master Plan, Hulhumalé has grown from accommodating residential projects to mega-scaled developments in commercial, industrial and most recently, in tourism by placing a new investment opportunity on the market; the Tourism Island.

SUN, SAND, SEA AND CITY

Located in the north of Hulhumalé Phase 2, the Tourism Island will be interconnected to the mainland by two bridges with exclusive accessibility via a private jetty. Managing Director of HDC, Suhail Ahmed states, "given the

ONE ISLAND, MULTIPLE HOTEL CONCEPT

The Tourism island is founded on the core strategy following the vision led by the Maldives' Ministry of Tourism, that diversification is key to tourism recovery and growth amidst a pandemic. In place of Maldives' renowned one-island, one-hotel concept, the Tourism Island will be designed with a multiple hotel concept offering a range of lodging options to welcome all types of travellers. The island will house luxury villas, serviced apartments, mid and upscale hotels and guesthouses that will be complemented by branded retail and dining outlets. The island will also feature a statement tower approximately 150m tall, which will serve visitors with an iconic view of the surrounding archipelago. This unique concept is anticipated to attract global residents seeking an address in the Maldives, and visitors, locals and digital nomads in search of a metropolitan experience in an island city.

A JOURNEY OF SUSTAINABILITY

The proximity of the Tourism Island and its direct connectivity to the local population will pave way for professionals in all fields to place themselves in this lucrative industry. The challenges presented with having to travel and work away from home are minimized, enabling the great majority of the local population residing in Greater Male' region to establish careers within the many novel opportunities that will be created in this process. There is also potential advent for transit tourism, cruise tourism and further opportunities for MICE tourism, introducing itineraries that incorporate local food, tours and attractions extending beyond Hulhumalé to inhabited islands in the greater capital region promising direct economic benefits to local businesses and communities.

Aligning with HDC's smart city initiative for Hulhumalé, the Tourism Island will be designed with open green spaces, a sustainable intra island transportation system with electric vehicles and supporting smart technology and infrastructure ensuring responsible island operations.

OPEN FOR INVESTMENT

HDC is currently seeking investors, developers and brands for collaboration on the Tourism Island project. Interested parties are welcome to contact HDC at business@hdc.com.mv





THE MALDIVES: World's Leading Tourism Destination

By: Maldives Integrated Tourism Development Corporation

The Republic of Maldives is a pristine garland of over 1000 isles, dispersed across the Indian ocean in an area of just 298Km². Records from the historians confirms that, these islands had been populated for centuries and that we, Maldivians had indeed traveled far and wide to visit and meet with the Great Rulers of the prominent Kingdoms of ancient times.

Being surrounded by miles and miles of sea, Maldivians are most comfortable in the water, having conquered the far reaches of the oceans known to the world. Likewise, Maldivian fishermen do not need further introduction then, and even now. In fact, our fishermen are well known for their sustainable fishing techniques and are perceived as excellent paragons of the fishing industry of the world. Since history can remember, the Maldivian economy has long relied on the profits brought in by fishing, agriculture of crops and seafaring activities.

Tourism was introduced to the Maldives almost half a century ago and had it not been introduced the way it was; what would be the current economic situation of the Maldives?

Tourism industry in the Maldives today, acts as the main and most important pillar of the Maldivian economy. Since introduction of tourism almost 50 years' ago, the Maldivian tourism industry has faced exponential growth and demand to become one of the most desired and world-renowned holiday destinations of the world, competing on par with other major players in the hospitality sector of the world. As a matter of fact, Maldives has long since overcome competition in the market from countries that are more developed, with investments on a much larger scale for this sector. Hence, many agree that Maldives has set the benchmark for international hospitality standards.

In terms of independence & resources, other countries especially the South Asian neighbors had long established laws and regulations, courts, banks, airports, seaports, civil services and other relevant institutions that required to kick start and run development plans for the tourism industries in their respective countries.

We Maldivians had to venture into this industry, from the basic foundations of tourism from the most bottom. Firstly, having to draft our own laws and regulations for tourism, creating institutions for training of locals for the hospitality industry, in addition to carrying out all the construction work involved in the infrastructure of tourism development was carried out by the forefathers. Even today, we see Maldivians carrying on this legacy and continuing this hard and arduous work of the pioneers of the tourism industry in the Maldives. The airport that we see today, the seaport, the telecommunication services, even the banks were built at the time by the locals, themselves.

During that time, a group of youth who realized the potential of this industry and was eager to introduce this lucrative industry into our island nation. However, a survey conducted by a distinguished international organization stated that, it was mere impossible to introduce tourism in to the Maldives, as there was no existing airport, telecommunication services nor banks in the country. Although the publication of this report was thought to be huge blow to the dreams of introducing tourism to the Maldives, it lit a fire within the enthusiastic youth and government of Maldives to address and overcome the challenges highlighted in this report.

The construction of the airport began almost immediately in the island of Hulhule' which was right adjacent to the capital Male'. Using metal boards and sheer grit, locals worked day and night to complete the construction of a safe and secure runway necessary for the flight operations required to introduce tourism. Next, a delegation from the Maldives travelled to the neighboring countries to negotiate & partner-up and introduce a banking service to the Maldives. Further, a well-known telecommunication service provider was also introduced to the Maldives at the time. Simultaneous to these actions, the locals were also getting ready to welcome the travelers to the Maldives by furthering opportunities for youth to study English medium in their local school syllabus and bringing necessary revisions to the laws and regulations of the Maldives, which had been set in stone in the existing courts and judicial system in the Maldives. The first fruits from the seeds planted by the determined

yet exhausting locals started bearing results with the inauguration of the first tourist resort in the Maldives in 1972. In fact, by the will of Almighty Allah SWT, this momentous day became the kickstart of tourism in the Maldives. We have seen an immensely impressive exponential growth of tourist arrivals to the Maldives every year for the years to come.

The message, Maldives as a holiday destination, spread like wildfire across the globe and this sparked a huge demand for resorts in the Maldives. More properties were opening up and more opportunities were being made available once the potential for tourism in the Maldives was fully realized. The standards for the properties opening up were also becoming higher; whereas Maldives had become an outstanding brand in the international tourism and hospitality market. Competition arose between esteemed hospitality brands of the world, as everybody wanted to include a property from the paradise in their destination portfolios.

Just a decade back in 2010, the regulation passed by the Maldivian lawmakers to allow guesthouse and tourist hotels to operate in the local islands across the Maldives, transformed the Maldivian tourism industry once again. This was a goldmine of opportunities for the locals living in such rural areas, which usually didn't have much economic activities. This regulation provided an excellent opportunity for our locals to bring income to these islands and to develop these areas. Subsequently, as a result of this, inhabited islands became more prosperous and land prices of the islands near Male' area increased in significant volume. Local tourism had become a successful venture for the government of Maldives. This is evidenced by the fact that local tourism now shares 20% of the bed capacity of the total tourism industry in just 10 years' time.

2019 was a very successful year for the Maldivian tourism industry as records showed over 1.7 million tourists (450% more than that of the total population) had visited the sunny side of life, the Maldives. With such an amazing turnout of tourists in 2019, the hospitality industry was anticipating eagerly to beat this record in 2020. However, the unprecedented and malicious spread of the Covid-19 pandemic across borders in early 2020 brought the worldwide tourism industry to a standstill, gravely affecting the Maldivian tourism industry as well.

Although the ongoing pandemic had caused a serious shock to the Maldivian economy, Maldivians worked hand in hand, bravely, in unity, to combat and mitigate the effects as much as possible. After the country was in lockdown for a period of time and tourism was at nil, just 6 months after the Maldivian borders opened up again 83% of tourist beds had been made operational. The current evidence of tourist inflows suggests that tourism has again picked up in the Maldives and hopes of a brighter future for those working in this sector has been ignited once again. Fifteen new resort properties are expected to be brought into operation during the 2021.

Despite the fact that Maldives has resort properties in nearly 170 islands of the 800 total uninhabited islands of the Maldives; it has proudly become the leading destination for tourism in the world. The international benchmark for luxury tourism has been set in gold by the Maldives. Our country has become a dream destination for couples, newlyweds and families. Resorts, hotels and restaurants all over the world are following the concepts of the tourism resorts of the Maldives, even naming some of their properties in relation to Maldives. "The Maldives" has become a brand in the tourism and hospitality industry and our focus should now be to maintain the position of the number one leading tourist destination of the world in such a competitive market by expanding tourism even further to the depths of the Maldives.

The pioneers of the tourism industry of the Maldives are still around, and we must gain morals from their brilliant contributions to our country. We must seek their advice and experience from sacrifices and devotion they committed to bring in success to our country, just 50 years' back was isolated and alien to the rest of the world. These pioneers deserve a golden place in our history books as heroes of our country. They succeeded in challenging the opinions published by a distinguished international organization, which believed that tourism could never be feasible for the Maldives, and revolutionized the country and its tourism industry within not even 50 years' time, to become the number one leading and most quality tourist destinations of the world. They are indeed heroes and economic saviors of our country.





IN CONVERSATION WITH MR. MOHAMED ASHRAF

General Manager of The Nautilus Maldives



What is your hospitality background thus far?

I have been lucky enough to gain experience in the tourism industry for over 20 years working at various upper-end luxury properties in highly sought-after holiday destinations such as Seychelles, Mauritius, Singapore, Malaysia and now the Maldives. The Nautilus is the pinnacle of my career so far and I am very proud to have worked my way up through the rankings to now be the General Manager of one of the most ultra-luxury resort properties in the Indian Ocean.

With every property I lead, I grow prouder of the achievements my teams and colleagues make. Most recently, The Nautilus won the three most recognised luxury travel awards; Tatler's 'Best Private Island Retreat' 2021, Condé Nast Traveller's 'The Gold List' 2021 and Condé Nast Traveller's 'Best Resort in the Indian Ocean' as well as being recognised amongst the top three best resorts in the world. And all of this within its first year of operation.

What are your main learnings from your experience in the tourism industry so far?

I have learnt that nothing good comes easily. Working in the hospitality industry requires a lot of determination and resilience. All of the intricate planning and continual meetings behind the scenes keep properties ticking for guests to delight in the best holiday they have ever experienced.

My second learning would be that having a strong, communicative and energetic team is vital to any successful property. If your team is clear about the overall vision, their role and are willing to help each other no matter what their department specialises in, it's these relationships make it possible to achieve outstanding things.

How has covid-19 adapted the tourism industry for you and your property?

As the Covid global pandemic is the main challenge, we need to work harder than before to reassure our guests that we are still a safe haven for them and their families. Guests need reassurance at the highest level for health & safety standards adhered in line with the health authorities.

The Maldives made a bold decision to keep borders open in recent weeks despite the new strain of Coronavirus spreading rapidly throughout Europe. However, we are so grateful for the continuous support shown by the Ministry of Tourism. We remain working closely with them in all our larger projects to keep our guests' safety at the forefront of everything we do. It's also essential for all properties, including The Nautilus, to utilise this time to help grow their repeat guest base. The Nautilus has explicitly excelled in this area through a determination to provide a world-class bespoke experience for guests and offer nothing below this standard.

With the Golden Jubilee of Tourism coming up next year in 2022, we are confident that together as a team

alongside the Ministry of Tourism, we will be able to commemorate and continue the hugely impressive growth in tourism the Maldives has seen over the last few decades.

What do you hope the future of the Maldives tourism looks like?

I hope that we see more key markets emerging not just for the Nautilus, but for the country in general. To be able to welcome as many people as we can from as many countries as possible is such an exciting prospect for us. We are so proud of our culture and to be able to share this with more people over the next few years humbles us. What's more, I would like to see the continuation of longer stays. We have seen this trend grow since Covid began. Having the opportunity to be able to get to know our guests better, simply because they are staying at the property for longer is something I have personally really enjoyed.

What are your predictions for changes to the demographic coming to the Maldives?

The key markets attracted to the Maldives varies based upon the property the guest is visiting. Whether guests are looking for an ultra-luxe, highly discreet and intimate retreat, much like The Nautilus, or a much larger island with higher guest volumes and offering fun sports activities, the Maldives does attract people from all over the world and all ages for its outstanding natural beauty and the exceptional Maldivian customer service.

With Covid playing a vital factor in enabling tourists to continue visiting the Maldives, we have seen a shift towards the uber-affluent guest demographic. From Russia to the UK and the HNW Indian traveller market have emerged as important markets for the Maldives to maintain tourism levels high.

In particular, The Nautilus caters to ultra-high net worth individuals, couples, families and circles of friends who have a clear idea of what they want and are looking for the simplest, elemental pleasures in life – the ability to simply be – that forms the greatest luxury of all. The Nautilus delights in offering highly bespoke experiences to 'connected clans' (multigenerational family escapes or circles of friends travelling together) and 'free-spirited sophisticates' (couples and individuals who want to experience the freedom to simply be with one another).

What are your thoughts for how the Maldives and the tourism industry will recover from covid-19?

Crises are nothing new in hospitality nor for the Maldives. Think about the Tsunami in 2004 or the bomb attack in Male' in 2007. Of course, the impact of Covid is unprecedented, and we all have to continue operating in an uncertain future. Regulations on capacity reduction and increased operations cost will continue affecting the profitability of the industry. Privacy, control and hygiene are non-negotiables. Therefore, we all need to focus on building trust in our guests, reinforcing our brand and adapting our operations to the so-called "new normal".

"I have learnt that nothing good comes easily. Working in the hospitality industry requires a lot of determination and resilience. All of the intricate planning and continual meetings behind the scenes keep properties ticking for guests to delight in the best holiday they have ever experienced."

Those strategies will be valuable in current situation as well as in the near future, when the pandemic is under control. We'll have to continue rethinking both where our guests and business will come from, and the services they will expect. It is important that we keep the changed guests' needs and expectations in mind to keep our destination and properties relevant in the future and attract new guests.

What are the new trends in luxury that you predict and are experiencing?

For our target guests, being ultra high net worth individuals, privacy and freedom will continue being the ultimate luxury. They are looking for absolute stand-out experiences away from crowds and with low interaction. Our guests are increasingly looking for enhanced personalisation when they travel.

The pandemic has made ultra luxury guests even more demanding with a strong need of travel products and services are tailored to them, at all levels. Therefore, we pay even more attention to the detail than before.

Apart from that, we see an increased demand for longer stays above 7 nights with a need for more flexible booking terms and conditions in case of forced cancellation has come into play.

Guests are looking for workation packages where they can work from paradise, either from the luxury of their private house, on a luxury yacht whilst enjoying a dolphin cruise or a nearby private sandbank. The nature of how people can work, i.e. remotely, is changing, and we hope to reflect that in our offerings.

We have also seen an increase in the interest of armchair travel and slow travel. The former is for those countries whose borders remain close and will be for weeks to come. Properties around the Maldives have had to adapt to transporting their guests to their property via the

power of social media and digital marketing.

On the other hand, slow travel is for those who can travel more freely already. It entails guests studying the location they are visiting, such as the Maldives, a lot more than they would have previously done. Knowing all of the details about their trip is what properties such as The Nautilus are experts at, personalising guests' experiences even before they have arrived.

We see an increased interest in private group travel and as such island buy-out requests and there will continue to be a high level of spontaneity in the market, with booking windows just days and weeks before arrival.

Our guests are looking for transformative, thoughtful and intelligent holiday experiences as well as money-can't-buy experiences. The pandemic has also made guests looking for escapes focused on wellness and health, whereby strengthening their immune system and overall wellbeing.

What is your advice for those who hope to begin their career in the tourism industry?

It's always so exciting for people in my position as General Manager to see new talent emerge from all over the world with such passion and potential to flourish into true industry leaders. My advice is to be persistent in achieving greatness in every role you take on. A highly esteemed position comes with much experimentation within roles and departments before finding the one you are most attracted to. Stick with it, because all of the smaller roles you do when you are younger will help you in ways you won't have even realised when you are older with more industry knowledge.

I would also say that never losing the appreciation for where we work is essential. Working in hospitality, we can travel to countries throughout our careers that others never get the opportunity to even visit for a holiday. Therefore, it's vital for new and upcoming talent not to forget the natural beauty of where they work despite sometimes working long and hard days.

In the current situation, upcoming hospitality talent will need to be patient and show great flexibility, when finding a job during or after Covid. However, the industry needs young and innovative talents more than ever, individuals who are open to looking at things differently.



“The smaller roles you do when you are younger will help you in ways you won’t have even realised when you are older with more industry knowledge.”



MS. ZEESHAN SHIHAB

From a Substitute Teacher to the Executive Director of a Local Tourism Brand

Is hospitality industry where you want to be for the rest of your life?

I am not sure that there was a “yes” moment as such for me personally; however having said that I think for me one of my career defining moments was the 25th of July 2016, the day we opened Malahini. This remains one of my biggest achievements and as one of my proudest days. The little moments of gratification of seeing our own brand and product flourish has always given me immense satisfaction and concreted the fact that this is indeed the industry and field that I would want to continue in.

What and when was your first job?

My first real job was early 1997 as a substitute teacher at Aminiya School.

Heard you worked at the AG’s office too? Can you tell me more about it?

This was where 14 year-old me always dreamed of working. hehe. Our futures although have very different plans in store for us, and where I have ended up today is what I would be doing even if I had to re-live my life again. Working under the Attorney General gave me the discipline and work ethics, opened my eyes to the rigors of the working world and compassion towards other people. I ended my four years with the AG’s office when I got the opportunity to study and work at Bandos Maldives.

Can we talk about some of the challenges you’ve faced during your career?

One of the biggest challenges that I’ve faced was the designing, developing and pre-opening of Malahini. Having had no prior experience of managing such a project everything from tendering, sourcing, manning, planning, strategizing and marketing was a learning curve. Having just finished my MBA prior to the development of Malahini was something in my corner tha helped me immensely through-out this time.

It was quite a daunting task, launching a local brand with an extremely limited budget. The Maldivian Tourism Industry is extremely challenging with many international brands and ensuring our place in the market and making it a success was quite a lot of work.

One of the best things that we had going for us was a very small high performing team that managed to finish an intense project in quite a short period of time. The challenges faced during the pre-opening of Malahini can only be compared to the challenges I’ve had to face during the pandemic last year.

Strategies implemented during COVID-19 and lessons learned?

Being one of the first resorts to close down due to COVID-19 on the 19th of March was one of the toughest days for me. The next would be April 4th; the day we bid goodbye to the majority of our workforce. In what was an unprecedented time for even the most experienced of companies; I found ourselves struggling during March. One of the greatest lessons of COVID-19 is learning to lean on others and not carrying the burden alone. One of my best decisions was to form a Crisis Management team and have every major decision made after lengthy discussion within this core team.

A lot of the time this meant conceding to majority opinion and having the insight of entirely out of the

box thinking which I wouldn't otherwise had been privy to. One of our best takeaways from the pandemic was the rewards of being transparent and open communication with the Crew to ensure Crew buy-in. Transparency and a lot of one to one communication with the team meant that we were able to iron out a lot of the disgruntlements, disappointments and frustrations and ensured a co-operative team. Striking a balance between keeping the workforce motivated but at the same time ensuring that they were aware of the struggles of the Company so that the workforce understood the financial difficulties was always a fine line. I am deeply indebted to my team who stuck by us during the toughest 6 months with a lot of personal sacrifices.

The pandemic has also taught us to keep strategizing, re-strategizing, guesstimating and trying to survive while staying positive. I think it is also very important to be mindful and celebrating small wins at uncertain times like this to keep our spirits up.

As a woman what are your challenges in this industry?

As with starting any new job, when you first go to a resort, there are specific challenges that you face that are unique to the industry, especially resorts. This may

“Respect is earned in any working environment through how we conduct ourselves and this is no different in Resorts.”

sometimes be exacerbated by virtue of being a woman. As we live and work in Resorts and get to go home on either off days or off time; we need to be mentally prepared for the seclusion and learning to work in a male dominant environment.

As women starting off in the Resort industry, it is important to learn to balance our work life and personal life. Respect is earned in any working environment through how we conduct ourselves and this is no different in Resorts.

My first resort was Bandos twenty years ago as an intern; my very naïve self, found talking to my roommates immensely helpful in what to expect and how to deal with some of the challenges. Talking to a colleague or a woman in the industry and learning the ropes before you start your work so that you are mentally prepared for it will be quite helpful.

The working environments and culture of most of the resorts today emphasizes the importance of inclusivity.

From where I started twenty years ago; I think we have made significant strides in our effort of achieving a truly inclusive workforce in the Resort industry where every employee irrespective of their gender feels supported and respected. Having said that however, to my mind there is still a long way for us to go on this road.

How do you see the future of Maldivian Tourism industry?

I think the future of Maldivian Tourism Industry will be centered around sustainable tourism. Today's travelers are becoming more responsible and purposeful. Therefore, more emphasis needs to be given to sustainability; and recognizing the efforts of the initiatives taken by individual resorts may encourage this.

Climate Change is a reality that we all need to face, especially a country like the Maldives where we are dependent on our coral reefs and beaches for the majority of our income. Erosion is taking place at certain vulnerable islands at a level where we cannot turn a blind eye anymore. The recent laws passed by the government with regard to single use plastics was a win in this fight.

I think one of the lessons we have learnt from the pandemic is to always be prepared for a crisis. This came entirely out of the left field and left us all spinning. I think it will take us a while to recover and we are all looking forward to the Golden Year 2022.

Your thoughts on why we don't see so many women, especially local women in top positions at resorts and hotels

I think there are several reasons.

The geography of the Maldives I feel is a big contributory factor to the first reason unfortunately. What I mean here is that working in a resort would mean that you will only be able to go back home to your family during off time and off days. If you are working in a Resort far away from your island, visiting your family would be even more infrequent. However, we know that majority of the men in our country do this.

Our culture exerts certain expectations on women. I believe the expectations in our culture for a woman in the family unit needs to change. If the woman has a higher earning potential than the man our partners and families needs to understand this and let the woman earn. It is very rarely that we see a male spouse allowing their female partner to earn whilst looking after their family. These perceptions and cultural expectations also needs to change if we want to see more women ascend to top positions.

Secondly, the negative perception that the older generation had towards women working in Resorts had hindered women; however, we find that this is now slowly changing. There has always been this fear and misconception that Resorts will make girls bad and is generally seen as an unsafe environment. When in reality the resort accommodation, environment and the policies of many Resorts makes them a much safer place than living in a city. I have personally spoken to parents and boyfriends of girls working to convince them that this is a safe environment and to let them work.

Thirdly, our way of thinking with regards to what we are capable of needs to change. Women need to realize that there's rarely a position in a resort that cannot be filled by a woman. It's very heart-warming now to see women in positions such as boat captains and crews, who are continuing to prove that they do have what it takes contrary to societal expectations.

Like I told one of the girls hesitant to join a managerial position; your age, where & when you started, being married or not doesn't matter when you have talent. It is simply enough that someone else believes in you and therefore we need to believe in ourselves that we are more than capable of pulling it off.



“Women need to realize that there’s rarely a position in a resort that cannot be filled by a woman.”

-Zeeshan Shihab



HUSSAIN MUAADH

A Rising Star at Velaa Private Island Resort

*“Even if you can’t
achieve it today, if
you have the right
mind, you can
achieve it
tomorrow”*

Hussain MUAADH joined Velaa Private Island as a Boat Crew at the age of 18, now he is a permanent staff working as a store attendant.

A year spent at the resort has made him fall in love with the industry immensely and wants to pursue his career in the tourism industry.

“I always loved being on the sea and applied to Velaa seeing a casual job for a boat crew. I joined Velaa on 1st January 2018, I was 18 years old.

The management and staff here are very helpful and supportive, I learn something new every day. I love interacting with guests and I want to grow bigger in this field.

While working as a boat crew, I was offered a permanent job as a store attendant. But I miss the sea and look forward for another chance to work on the sea.

I would like to thank the Velaa management and all my colleagues here for helping and guiding me without even asking.

I enjoy learning about the best practices and getting to know about the standards from the best people in the industry.



BODU THAKURUFAANU MEMORIAL CENTER

By: National Center for Cultural Heritage



Welcome to Utheemu! Behold as you stand on a land filled with epic history and true patriotism. Your destination today isn't simply a haven of idyllic natural beauty and serenity, but it is also the home of one of the most revered and respected national heroes of Maldives. It is also the place which nurtured and fostered three valiant Maldivians whose unwavering resistance against those that threatened the peace and harmony of the nation has become an iconic representation of nationalism and courage. And thus this particular Island, the Island of Haa Alifu Utheemu becomes evermore significant for the many material and tangible depictions of the life and Times of Sultan Ghaazee Mohamed Thakurufaanul Auzum and his family. And these mementos provide an impetus to constantly remind us of the courage and fervour of the three Utheemu Brothers, Mohamed Thakurufaanu, Ali Thakurufaanu and Hassan Thakurufaanu.

Mohamed Thakurufaanu, the son of Utheemu Hussein Khatheeb Thakurufaanu was the gallant savior of Maldives from 15 torturous years of Portuguese occupation during the mid 16th century. He, together with his companions, led Maldives from impending darkness into the serene light of peace and sovereignty. And one of the most significant representation of this Hero's life is the Utheemu Palace, the residential home of Mohamed Thakurufaanu and his family. The Utheemu Palace is a constant reminder of the heroism of Mohamed Thakurufaanu and also a depiction of the mid 16th century traditional Maldivian lifestyle. It has, from time immemorial, being adhered with immense significance by the locals and have cut across the inter atoll boundaries to make this place of unwavering national importance. And the commendable manner of preservation employed by the people of Utheemu serve as a fine example of heritage management and preservation. The Palace has been retained in all its traditional gloss and patina to show the future generations, untainted tangible evidence of Mohamed Thakurufaanu and his family.

Bodu Gekolhu

This was the residence of Hussain Khatheebu Thakurufaanu, and the family home of Muhammad

Thakurufaanu and his brothers. This house is more than five hundred years old and as such, is the oldest in Maldives. The date of construction is not known, but it has been estimated that the house was built during the reign of Sultan Kalhu Muhammad Siri Dhanmaru Bavana Mahaaradhun. (This Sultan reigned three times, during the late 15th and the early 16th century). The house was built in a slightly different style from other houses of the period. Props of Kaani (*Cordia subcordata*) wood were driven into the ground, the low base wall was built between these and the wood forming the base of the framework of the house was fixed on this foundation. The walls of the house were made of plaited Laadhun'buri (*Ocrosia oppositifolia*) sticks, and mats woven from screwpine leaves were used to cover these walls. The outer layer of the walls was made of coconut thatch and the house had a thatched roof.

Mariyaadhu Gekolhu

This was the enclosed pavilion where visitors were received and entertained. Faathimaafaanu, also lovingly called Dhaithaa Kamanaa, the elder sister of Muhammad Thakurufaanu, resided here. This part of the Palace was built some years after the construction of the main house. Tradition says that this building was constructed with the help of the Utheemu Brothers, Ali, Muhammad and Hassan.

A curious feature of this building is the door on the western side of the Mariyaadhuge, leading to the old house. This door remains wedged open by about four inches and is said to have remained thus for centuries. Tradition says that on the night when the family fled the island to seek sanctuary in Maliku (Minicoy), in their haste, the door was pulled shut so violently that it hit the doorframe and came back, wedging open as it still remains today. The structure of the Mariyaadhuge itself is not level, the western corner being lower than the rest of the building by about six inches.

A few changes have been brought about to this part of the Palace. In this aspect, the roof structure has been changed to coconut timber and the thatch on the roof replaced by roofing sheets. In addition, the floor has been paved and covered with fine white sand. In the early days, Kashiveli (coarse white coral sand) used to be spread both inside and outside the Mariyaadhu Gekolhu. This building has been elevated approximately two feet (the width of four beams of coconut wood) from its original height.

Kalhu Ali Khateeb Thakurufaanu's Residential Area
This was the area used by Kalhu Ali Khateeb Thakurufaanu, the grandfather of Muhammad Thakurufaanu. The visible foundation is that of his house which was built of coconut timber. It is believed that this house was vacated by him during the reign of Sultan Ali V (Dhon Bulhaa Faashinaa Kilege, 1512-1513 AD), when his son Hussain Khateeb Thakurufaanu, upon being conferred the position of Khateeb, constructed the present house just east of his father's establishment and moved there with his family.

Kitchen

These are the low base walls and foundation of what used to be the Utheemu Palace kitchen. Initially the kitchen walls were made of Oshi (ribs of coconut fronds) and covered with thatch. The well, situated nearby is still an important source of water for people of the island.

Ashige

This particular area called the Ashige, was used by the family of Muhammad Thakurufaanu to accommodate guests arriving with visiting dignitaries. It was used as sleeping quarters for such guests. This was a tradition upheld in the homes of well established island families of the time. It is said that Dhuvaafaru Dhandhelu, the dedicated compatriot of the Utheemu Brothers during their struggle against the Portuguese, was one of the people who used the Ashige as a place to rest and sleep. The Ashige was also used for assemblies of the island people, for meetings, on religious occasions, and festivities and feasts hosted by the family. During the time of Muhammad Thakurufaanu, the floor of this structure had been higher, elevated about 40 inches from the ground, with wooden cross beams laid, and the whole structure covered by wooden planks, the entire floor space forming a very spacious Ashi. The space beneath the floor boards was used to store items like cowries, coconuts, coir rope and stocks of rice. However the only remnants of the period today are the four vertical pillars.

The Ashige is still used for the commemoration of religious occasions and for prayers to mark the death anniversary of Muhammad Thakurufaanu. On such occasions the interior of the Ashige is decorated with patterned and beautifully embroidered drapes hung on the walls. Till date, the Ashige has been located in the same place and retains the same measurements as during the era of Muhammad Thakurufaanu. The latest conservation effort of the Ashige was carried out in late 1999.

Leggi Valhukolhu (Well)

The kadhaa valhu is a well situated to the south of the Ashige. This particular well is made up of three parts. Oral tradition says that the Utheemu Sultan, Muhammad Thakurufaanu, got this well from the island of Vaadoo during his voyage to Huvadhu atoll. It is said that while they were travelling North with the well through Huvadhu Kandu with the well, the sea became rough and they had to through it over board. Popular belief has it that the well subsequently drifted to the island of Utheemu, where it was placed in front of the Ashige by Hassan Rannabandeyri Kilegefaanu, the Utheemu Sultan's brother.

Kandhuvalu Mosque

This is also a historically significant Mosque linked to the history of Mohammed Thakurufaanu and his family. This Mosque was used for prayers by the family. In addition,

this Mosque becomes particularly prominent because it was near this Mosque that the Utheemu Brothers conducted the famous prayers asking for victory against the Portuguese.

Conforming to the styles of traditional Maldivian architecture, the Mosque features lacquered wooden beams with verses from the Quran, prayers and other sermons inscribed on them. The stated date is 1295 A.H. The Mosque compound also houses the grave of Utheemu Ali Khatheeb Thakurufaanu. This tomb is located to the North of the Mosque within the cemetery. The tomb of Hussein Khatheeb Thakurufaanu lies to the left of the Mosque entrance. The only writing on this tomb is the inscription of Bismi and Shahaadath. And interestingly the design of the headstone is that usually ascribed to women. There is another grave to the right as well but no clear indication of who is buried is available. This headstone is a male one. To the east of the Mosque is a shrine called Sayyid Hussein Ziyaarai. The writing on this shrine being undecipherable has not yielded a name of who is buried there.

Kaani Tree

Weaving was a profitable economic activity in Maldives in earlier times. Some of the woven fabrics were exported but most of the clothes worn by Maldivians were from

cloth woven in the islands. This Kaani tree (*Cordia subcordata*) is said to have originated from one of the Kaani wood props planted in the ground to fix the weaving loom of the Utheemu Brothers. (This would have been during the early 1540's.)

When can you visit the Utheemu Palace? And How?

You do need to purchase a ticket in order to take a tour of the Palace. This is available from the Office of The Bodu Thakurufaanu Memorial Centre.

Ticketing Hours: 0800hrs -1400hrs.



TOURIST ARRIVALS

2020
JANUARY-DECEMBER
Total Arrivals
555,494 (-67.4)

2021
JANUARY (as of 31st)
Total Arrivals
92,103 (-46.9)

TOTAL ARRIVALS 2021	Arrivals		Growth (%)	Daily Average	Duration of Stay (days)
	2020	2021			
January 2021 (1-31st)	173,347	92,103	-46.9	2,971	9.2
Total	173,347	92,103	-46.9	2,971	9.2

MARKET TRENDS



AMERICAS	EUROPE	AFRICA	MIDDLE EAST	ASIA & THE PACIFIC
2020 32,060 (-62.2)	2020 348,349 (-58.2)	2020 6,458 (-65.5)	2020 26,288 (-56.2)	2020 142,243 (-79.8)
2021 (as of 31st Jan) 3,840 (-52.5)	2021 (as of 31st Jan) 63,748 (-32.7)	2021 (as of 31st Jan) 890 (-42.1)	2021 (as of 31st Jan) 2,367 (-67.6)	2021 (as of 31st Jan) 21,233 (-65.6)

TOP 10 MARKETS 2021

(as of 31st January)

1.		Russia (22.8%) 20,973 (+67.4%)	6.		France (4.0%) 3,728 (-46.4%)
2.		India (20.8%) 19,135 (+38.2%)	7.		Germany (3.7%) 3,390 (-65.6%)
3.		Ukraine (7.8%) 7,210 (+196.2%)	8.		U.K. (2.7%) 2,504 (-76.7%)
4.		Kazakhstan (4.8%) 4,434 (+152.5%)	9.		U.S.A. (2.1%) 1,960 (-61.2%)
5.		Romania (4.3%) 3,921 (+93.5%)	10.		Switzerland (2.1%) 1,958 (-35.5%)

FACILITY UPDATES

Tourist Accommodation

(as of 31st January 2021)

	Nos.	Beds
Resorts / Marinas	144	33,192
Hotels	11	1,458
Guesthouses	135	2,610
Safari Vessels	324	6,060
Total	614	43,320

Approved Tourist Accommodation Facilities by Atolls

(as of 31st January 2021)

ATOLL	Resorts		Guesthouses		Hotels	
	Nos.	Beds	Nos.	Beds	Nos.	Beds
Haa Alif	2	394	7	84	-	-
Haa Dhaalu	-	-	2	44	1	104
Shaviyani	2	457	1	8	-	-
Noonu	7	1,398	1	24	-	-
Raa	12	2,962	-	-	-	-
Baa	15	2,773	13	276	1	150
Lhaviyani	9	2,250	-	-	-	-
Kaafu	47	11,338	139	3,304	6	856
Alifu Alifu	9	1,906	74	954	-	-
Alifu Dhaalu	16	4,200	39	632	1	56
Vaavu	2	302	27	362	-	-
Meemu	1	160	-	-	-	-
Faafu	1	250	1	14	-	-
Dhaalu	8	2,728	-	-	-	-
Thaa	1	152	1	12	-	-
Laamu	2	242	2	78	-	-
Gaafu Alifu	6	1,030	-	-	1	136
Gaafu Dhaalu	3	550	2	38	-	-
Gnaviyani	-	-	9	94	-	-
Seenu	1	100	6	136	1	156
TOTAL	144	33,192	324	6,060	11	1,458

MONTH IN REVIEW

President Launches First issue of Maldives Tourism Bulletin



President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, launched the first issue of the Maldives Tourism Bulletin on 1st January 2021. Announcing the launch via Twitter, President Solih expressed confidence that the tourism magazine would become a useful resource for industry stakeholders, students and visitors.

Maldives Welcomes First Tourist of 2021



Maldives welcomed its first tourist of 2021 at Velana International Airport (VIA) on Friday. Officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), Maldives Immigration and Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL) greeted the German national, Mr. Jochen Paul Karch following his arrival via Qatar Airways.

New Islands on Public Tender for Tourism Development

The Ministry of Tourism announced public tendering for the lease, development, operation and management of a Tourist Resort in three uninhabited islands and one plot of land in uninhabited island. The islands are; Alidhuffarufinolhu in Haa Alifu Atoll, 15 hectares of Plot of Land from Vaikaramuraidhoo in Haa Dhaalu Atoll, Kudalhaimendhoo in Shaviyani Atoll & Kunnamalei in Noonu Atoll. The islands shall be leased for a period of 50 (Fifty) years pursuant to Section 8 of the Law Number 2/99 (Maldives Tourism Act).

Maldives Participates in the 113th Session of the Executive Council Meeting of UNWTO and the Global Crisis Committee Meeting



The Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, participated in the 113th executive council meeting of the UNWTO which took place between 18-19 January 2021 at Madrid. The main agenda of the meeting pertained to the preparations for the 24th General Assembly of the UNWTO to be held at Morocco this year end. At the meeting, Minister Dr. Mausoom highlighted the tourism industry recovery initiatives and shared the strategic direction of Maldives tourism development.

Minister Dr. Mausoom also participated in the Global Tourism Crisis Committee meeting of 2021 which was held in Madrid, Spain where members discussed plans to restart tourism, pre and post vaccine cross-border travel and ways to introduce health certificates and travel passes within countries. This meeting was inaugurated by Mr José Luis Martínez-Almeida, Mayor, Madrid City Council, Spain.

Maldives Immigration Officially Launches Maldives Border Miles



Maldives Immigration, commenced Maldives Border Miles, the world's first tier-based travel loyalty programme at a ceremony held at Velana International Airport. Effective from 1st January 2021, the loyalty programme enables registered visitors to earn points by travelling to Maldives. Points are allocated to tourists under a criteria which includes the duration of their stay, frequency of travel, visits to celebrate special occasions and visits on Maldivian celebrations.

Maldives Makes it to Lonely Planet's List of Top Six Destinations to Travel to in 2021



Lonely Planet has compiled a list of the top six destinations travelers are looking forward to traveling to in 2021 and Maldives, undoubtedly, is on the list, with its luxurious resorts. In surveys and search results alike, the Maldives is trending high. Named the top destination for 2021 by Club Med per Google search data,

it also made to Expedia's list of the most-searched destinations for 2021, coming in at number 11, with the island of Maafushi, featuring on Airbnb's list of top trending destinations based on search results for travel in 2021.

MACL Attains ISAGO Certificate for the Third Consecutive Time



Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL) received (ISAGO) certification – the Safety Audit for Ground Operations by International Air Transport Aviation (IATA) for the third consecutive time. As a Ground Service Provider of Velana International Airport (VIA), MACL achieved the certification in 2016, 2018 and 2020, respectively.

MACL accomplished the requirements of ISAGO certification after an intensive audit carried out by IATA in areas of Organization and Management (ORM), Load Control (LOD), Passenger & Baggage Handling (PAB), Aircraft Handling & Loading (HDL), Aircraft ground Movement (AGM), Cargo & Mail Handling (CGM).





FRENCH NEWS CHANNEL FOCUS ON MALDIVES “Wealthy Tourists Return to Maldives for Maskless Holidays”

By: Lily Beach Resort

France2 visited Lily Beach Resort & Spa recently to witness first-hand how the tourism industry is faring during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main message of the news segment was an optimistic one, highlighting how the hospitality industry has been recovering in recent months, with a consistent flow of tourists coming to the resorts.

The stringent measures taken by all stakeholders; from the Ministry of Tourism, immigration authorities, and the resorts have allowed the industry to keep operating as normally as possible and even increasing momentum over time. Both the geographic disposition of the country and the ‘one-island-one-resort’ concept help to mitigate any pandemic related issues because each resort only hosts its staff and guests at any given time, and with prior negative PCR tests.

Patrice Aira, Lily Beach’s General Manager and a French national, commented that tourists are willing to come to the Maldives because it is regarded as one of the safest destinations in the world. A holiday in the Maldives offers a week or two respite from the stress and worry associated with months of the pandemic and corresponding lockdowns.

France2 also interviewed a tourist who mirrored the sentiment of many tourists travelling during this festive period. From the comments of said tourist interviewed in the segment, it is apparent that many tourists are happy to relax on a sunny island getaway over the end of year holidays to escape the harsh winter season happening in their respective home countries. No matter the reasoning, the Maldives is always happy to welcome tourists to enjoy all it has to offer. The news segment also showed that many

local Maldivians directly working at the resort and others who are indirectly benefiting from the industry depend on the good flow of tourists coming to the country for their livelihoods.

Ms. Angélique Forget, who is one of the main journalists spearheading this fact-finding expedition to the beautiful sandy shores of the Maldives, noted that the industry welcomed 500,000 tourists to the country in 2020. This was a great outcome given that the pandemic is still on-going. She noted that the tourism ministry and other such authorities are hoping for “an explosion of reservations for 2021”.

All associates at Lily Beach also hope for a better 2021 and are determined to continue offering quality services as things normalise and recover over the next few months.

The video segment in French can be viewed from the following page on France2’s website - https://www.francetvinfo.fr/decouverte/vacances/maldives-les-touristes-sont-de-retour-sur-l-archipel-paradisique_4244601.html

The video segment in English can be viewed from the following page on France24’s website - <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/focus/2021-11-11-wealthy-tourists-return-to-maldives-for-maskless-holidays>



THE NAUTILUS HAS OFFICIALLY BEEN INCLUDED IN CONDE' NAST TRAVELLER'S HIGHLY PRESTIGIOUS "THE GOLD LIST' 2021 & RENOWNED TATLER TRAVEL AWARDS

By: The Nautilus Maldives

The Nautilus has gained further international recognition within Condé Nast Traveller's world renowned 'The Gold List' 2021, as well winning 'Best Private Island Retreat' within Tatler's Travel Awards 2021. This dual-win is a huge achievement for The Nautilus, which only opened in 2019. Both The Gold List and the Tatler Travel Awards take place every year with only a handful of properties being selected to feature in each category. Selecting the absolute crème de la crème of the luxury hospitality world, The Nautilus' tiny private island ironically dominates the uber-competitive benchmarks of sheer excellence that warrant inclusion in such prestigious awards.

These two wins follow The Nautilus' first-place feat within Condé Nast Traveller's Readers' Choice Awards 2020 for 'Best Resort in the Indian Ocean', as well as its top three placing for 'Best Resorts in the World'.

General Manager Mr. Mohamed Ashraf states that "We are humbled by the international recognition The Nautilus is receiving within just one year of operating. Many world-renowned properties wait a lifetime to be featured within these awards, yet The Nautilus' quick rise to recognition for its excellence it's testament to its unrivalled ultra-luxe offering, incessant attention to detail and our loyal guests and team."

The Nautilus is the only Relais & Châteaux private island resort in the Maldives. Offering life unbound, its collection of 26 immensely private beach and ocean houses exists beyond the bounds of time. Our private

island is a place where nothing is fixed, and anything is possible. Where you are free to set your own beat. Free to do – and to be – as you please.

Conceptualised by a Maldivian hospitality icon and visionary entrepreneur who was instrumental in creating many award winning resorts, The Nautilus is the result of his lifetime's worth of expertise and represents what ultra luxury should be not just in the Maldives, but worldwide. The legacy of this visionary entrepreneurship is now carried forward by the next generation of the family. A celebration of the individual spirit, The Nautilus offers liberation and freedom unconditional. Space to share, to meet, where guests are encouraged to be themselves and shape their own personal journey. Above all, The Nautilus champions it's guests to reflect and celebrate with the people they're with, in any way they choose. Because in the end, it's these simple, elemental pleasures that ability to simply be that form the greatest luxury of all .

The Nautilus is the ideal choice for a private Indian Ocean escape. The already thorough cleaning and hygiene protocols have been further reinforced in line with public health guidelines issued by the WHO and local government authorities, and the team have been fully trained and informed of the new procedures. The Nautilus offers Covid-19 PCR testing onsite for guest convenience with results returned within 24 hours.

RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

By: Secret Paradise Maldives



Over recent years the terms responsible tourism, sustainable tourism and eco-tourism have become common vocabulary within the travel industry. Today's traveller, perhaps even more so in the post COVID world increasingly wants to take steps to cut their holidays' environmental impact. They are willing to engage with activities that counteract the impact of their trip - whether that be helping with beach cleaning projects or consciously booking more eco-friendly stays and properties.

But what do each of those phrases actually mean?

Responsible tourism refers to the way in which visitors, residents and businesses interact with a destination. This style of tourism should maximize the benefits to local communities and minimize negative social or environmental impact, helping local people to preserve fragile cultures and habitats. In many instances it is reflective of those who choose to travel responsibly and foster a positive interaction between themselves and their chosen destination. For example choosing environmentally friendly products or respecting local customs and traditions.

Sustainable Tourism is tourism that leads to the management of resources in such a way that economic, social, and environmental needs can be fulfilled. In essence it is the stakeholders of a destination, be that ourselves the operators, the government or similar tourism related bodies who work to achieve and improve sustainability. Examples include strengthening local production or protection of the environment.

Finally, Eco Tourism is defined by the International Eco Tourism Society as "responsible travel to natural areas that

conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015). The interests of the local population and a positive guest experience are the top priorities of ecotourism. One of the big advantages of ecotourism is that the majority of the revenue flows into the local economy. In essence ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainability. Certainly, one of the best ways to make a positive contribution to your holiday destination is to book with a property or company that puts something back into the local community and supports sustainable practises.



In the Maldives this means booking with award winning local tour company Secret Paradise, who since 2012 have been putting responsible and sustainable travel at the core of their business. Partnering guesthouse properties that are owned and managed by locals. Employing only local guides who between them have years of local knowledge and expertise to share. Promoting local island tourism in line with Maldivian culture and beliefs. Educating both guests and locals on the environment in so doing limiting wherever possible any negative impact to the fragile eco system of the Maldives. Just a few examples of how Secret Paradise tours have a positive impact.



KAIMOO RESORTS RECEIVE GOLD CERTIFICATE FOR COVID SAFETY

By: Kaimoo Resorts & Hotels

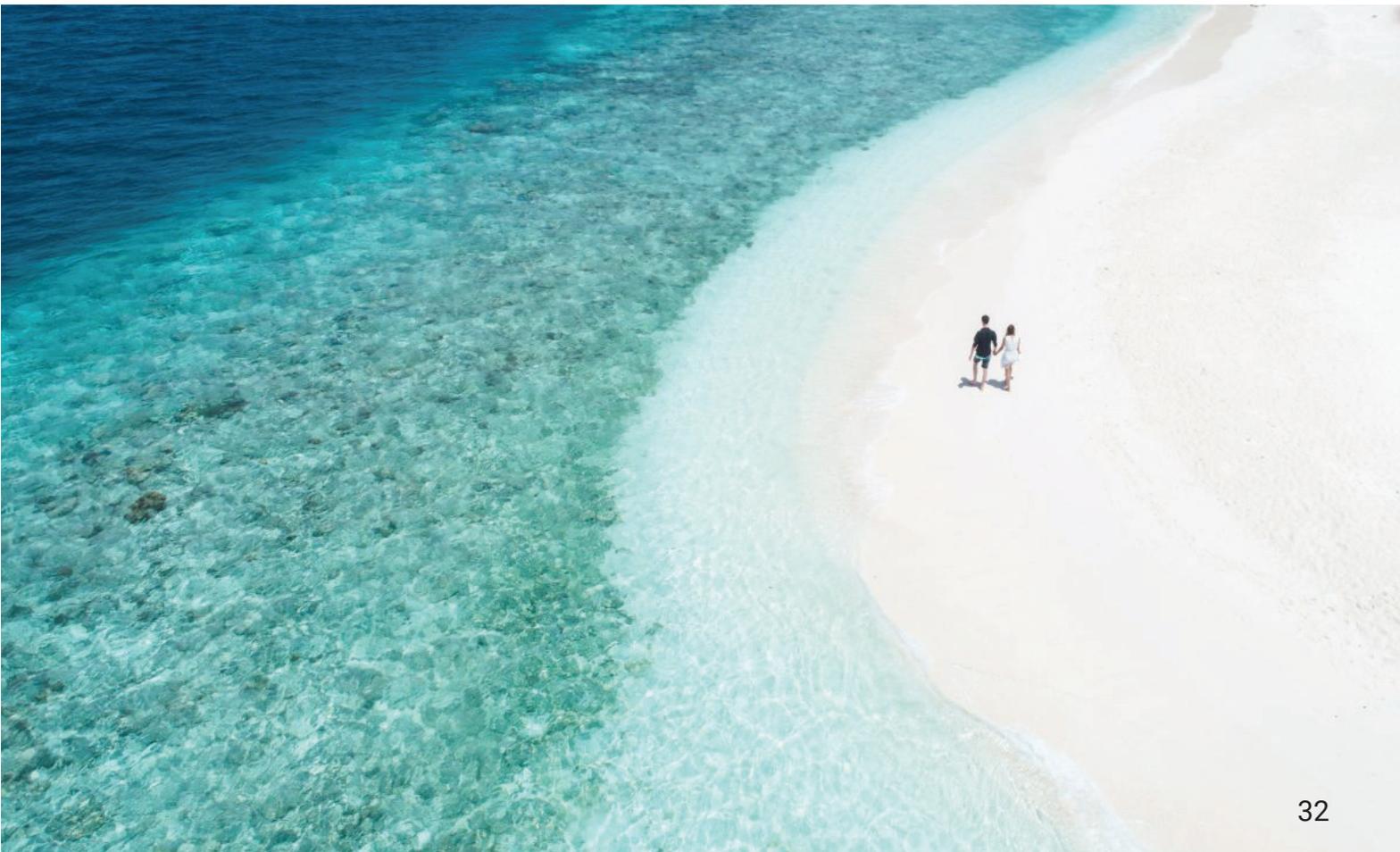
Summer Island Maldives, Embudu Village, and Equator Village have all received a Gold Certificate for their health, safety and hygiene measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The three properties, located in North and South Male' atolls, and Addu atoll respectively, are owned by Kaimoo Resorts and Hotels, a Maldivian owned tourism company based in Male'. The international certification, given by the organization Hotel Resilient, was issued to the resorts in December.

The certification process assesses each property's policies to counter the spread of the coronavirus. Protocols to protect guests and staff, cleaning procedures, hygiene measures, physical distancing measures, and plans for treating an infected person, are reviewed and given an assessment score.

The Gold Certificate is the highest certificate issued by Hotel Resilient. It is indicative of a resort's exemplary policies and protocols to keep guests and staff safe. Commenting on the Gold Certificates for the three resorts, Kaimoo Managing Director Manih Ahmed said:

"I am delighted to receive Gold Certification for our resorts. It demonstrates the safety of our properties, and the effectiveness of the COVID measures we put in place upon re-opening. Guests can have peace of mind that it is safe to holiday in the Maldives at our resorts."

Summer Island Maldives, Embudu Village, and Equator Village re-opened in September, introducing rigorous health and hygiene measures to counter COVID-19.



IMTM 2021: A Fresh Start to Reconnect, Revive & Regrow

By: International Maldives Travel Market

As the new year has begun, the International Maldives Travel Market (IMTM) has initiated IMTM 2021 to contribute to the ongoing recovery of the tourism sector in the Maldives.

IMTM is a travel and trade fair that plays an important role to bring together international buyers (Tour Operators, Travel Agents, Destination Management Companies and PR Companies) from around the world to liaise with the accommodation providers (Resorts, Hotels, Guesthouses, Liveboards, Dive Centers, Local Tour Operators and Travel Agents) of Maldives.

The year 2020 was a devastating year for all the industries around the world especially global Tourism. The rapid spread of coronavirus pandemic imposed restrictions and complete ban on international travel, the world came to a screeching halt, impacting millions of jobs and economic damages. However, with the help of UNWTO and other official tourism organisations, tourism sectors around the world worked hard to rebuild the tourism sector. Thus, the virtual exhibition was a part of IMTM's broader plan to gradually reopen the Maldives travel, tourism, and hospitality sector to new markets.

IMTM 2020 was held on IMTM's own virtual platform, IMTMair. The virtual B2B exhibition was a part of IMTM's broader plan to gradually reopen the travel, tourism and hospitality sector to new markets. The objective was to equip stakeholders with a tool to Reconnect, Revive and Grow the business, to provide them with all the business networking opportunities that they are used to as part of being physically present at the exhibition venue. It allowed multiple features including live sessions, and connection

requests to build company networks. The platform consisted of the main segment, the Exhibition Hall which provided each attendee with their own virtual table, in which any interested party could sit at and join the conversation. Each business- whether it be a travel agency or guesthouse- was provided with their own virtual booth to customize by adding brochures and products to advertise and promote their business operations.

Although IMTM 2020 concluded successfully, the event came with its own challenges. With the whole physical event swapped online, IMTM strived to provide the participants a personalised, engaging and fruitful platform to conduct their business meeting. Thus, as more challenges and obstacles are ahead for the new year, more enhancements to the IMTMair platform aspire to be received by even more participants as an excellent tool to assist and support the Maldives tourism industry's contribution to its success.

IMTM 2021 will ultimately focus on combining the physical and virtual fair to provide easier networking and connection between the participants in other countries in response to the current situations of the pandemic. Panic across the Maldives was conveniently controlled at the current rate, due to the unique geographical structure of the archipelago that provides natural isolation and separation between the islands, allowing tourists to be mostly separated from residential areas. With uncertainty on when exactly the global pandemic may come to an end, IMTM 2021 will continue to strengthen digitally and broaden the networks to provide ease in connectivity between our international buyers and local accommodation providers.



VAKKARU MALDIVES WINS FOUR TIMES OVER AT THE 2020 WORLD TRAVEL AWARDS



The private-island retreat has just been crowned a winner four times over at the 27th Annual World Travel Awards. Immensely proud to receive such recognition just three years after opening, the independently run resort has been named Indian Ocean's Leading Resort 2020 and The World's Leading Honeymoon Resort. Additionally, its immense signature four-bedroom overwater villa The Residence has been named both Maldives' Leading Hotel Suite 2020 and Indian Ocean's Leading Hotel Suite 2020.

Speaking about the resort's three category-topping placements at the 2020 World Travel Awards, Vakkaru

Maldives' general manager Iain McCormack said: "As we approach the end of such a momentous year, I could not be more thrilled that Vakkaru Maldives has been honoured four times over at the World Travel Awards. These accolades are testament to the tireless effort every Vakkaru team member makes to ensure every guest stay here is as special as can be. As travellers the world over slowly start to move again, we look forward to welcoming them to our palm-shaded beach villas, timber-framed overwater villas, and the unparalleled - and now multi-award-winning - grandeur and beauty of The Residence."



TASTES FROM THE SOUTHERN HEART OF MALDIVES

By: Aminath Manal

The Southernmost atoll of Maldives Addu Atoll, is interestingly heart shaped. The atoll has a fascinating history and was once a British base. Staying true to its geographical resemblance, the same heart goes into cooking in Addu atoll. As such special Addu delicacies are famed all over the Maldives. Even at present, traditional and authentic Maldivian dishes are a norm in the households of Addu. Here's a compilation of must-try-Addu-dishes.

Addu Bendi

Wrapped in banana leaf, this desert will surely keep you drooling. Young tender coconuts locally known as "Gabilhi" are blended with a traditional toddy-based sugar called "Dhiyahakuru". It is an intricate process that only the skilled could fully master. The end result is a sweet "Bendi", the perfect sweet fix. Everyone visiting Addu should definitely try to get their hands on this. It is quite famous among tourists and is also available from duty free shops at Velana International Airport.

Addu Havadha Curry

This must-try curry is a local delicacy. Often, it's a fish curry though the chicken version is recently getting popular. The secret ingredient is a roasted local spice mix known as "Addu Havaadha". Its flavors are quite balanced with hints of coconut flavor and the type of meat used. Addu Havadha curry ranges from an everyday dish to a special dish. It could be either served with rice or flatbread depending on the preference. Though curry did not originate from Maldives, locals have adapted and created this distinctive mouthwatering curry.

Faabatha fen

It is a refreshing drink, sweet and mildly spicy at the same time. It is brewed with spices and has medicinal properties. This drink is particularly soothing after a heavy meal. It is loved by so many fellow locals.

Fuppibaih

This snack has been passed on from generations, and is still a local favorite. Rice along with "Dhiyahakuru", pepper, cardamon and ginger are cooked thoroughly and cooled down. It is wrapped in banana leaves and has a hot and sweet flavor. This would be a great treat to take back home.

Addu can be a local food heaven for those who would like to savor these authentic dishes. The southern atolls have a similar cuisine and you may also find one of these dishes in Gnaviyani or Huvadhu atoll. But if you ever visit Addu, you should definitely spare some moments to enjoy these delicacies.





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