EDITORIAL

Editor
Thayyib Shaheem

Content Editors
Mariyam Sharmeela
Fathimath Shifa
Aminath Manal Musthafa
Hasaana Hassan

Contributors
Tourist Facilities

Photos
Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation
Cover Photo: Shivaz
Back Cover Photo: Dusit Thani Maldives

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DID YOU KNOW?

The first direct flight to the Maldives from Europe was Condor which landed at Male’ International Airport, now known as Velana International Airport on 31st October 1981.
MALDIVES TOURISM GOLDEN YEAR
SPECIAL FEATURE

Ahmed Mujuthaba
The First Maldives Minister of Tourism

As a special segment during this Golden Year of Tourism in the Maldives, we will be featuring veterans of Maldives tourism. Our first feature on this note is, Mr. Ahmed Mujuthaba, a veteran cabinet minister of the Maldives.
Hon. Ahmed Mujuthaba was the first Maldivian Minister of Tourism. Prior to becoming the Minister of Tourism, he has filled various portfolios in the government. His involvement in the tourism sector began when he was appointed as the Director at Department of Tourism and Foreign Investment on 3 October 1979. He was in-charge of this office until Department of Tourism was established on 10 November 1982. Six years later on 12 December 1988, the Ministry of Tourism was established and Mr. Ahmed Mujuthaba was appointed as the Minister of Tourism on 5 January 1989. He filled this cabinet portfolio as the Minister of Tourism until 29 May 1990. Read on to find out his insights on Maldives tourism then and now.

You served as the very first Minister of Tourism of Maldives. How did this portfolio come to be? Can you recall your days as the Minister of Tourism?
I was involved with tourism as Director of Department of Tourism and Foreign Investment from October 1979 to November 1982. At that time, I had to report to the President.

At that time the biggest generating markets were Germany and Italy and most of the promotion was done by tour operators of those countries. Many tourists had combined tours of one-week round trip of Sri Lanka culture and one week beach relaxation in Maldives. Maldives was for barefoot beach tourism or divers. Some called it "No news, no shoes."

Bed night tax was introduced beginning of 1980.

I was appointed Minister in the newly created Ministry of Tourism beginning of 1989. My biggest task was to convince the tour operators and those who wished to visit that Maldives was a safe destination after the tragic terrorist attack on November 3, 1988. The Ministry was active in travel fairs in several countries. My stint as Tourism Minister ended in June 1990.

How was tourism in the Maldives back in 1989? What major changes took place after the establishment of a Ministry for regulating tourism in the Maldives?
In 1989 there were not many international brands in Maldives. As I remember only Taj and Club Med. Other properties operated by Maldivian companies. I tried to get the private sector opinion on how we could move forward.

Tourism in the Maldives has evolved since its inception in 1972. Today the tourism sector contributes over 40% to the country’s GDP. What is your view on the development trajectory of tourism in the Maldives?
If you apply a satellite account system the GDP contribution from tourism will be much higher. As long as Maldives remain a safe place the tourist arrivals will keep on increasing.

The year 2022 will mark 50 years to the tourism in Maldives, what changes are you anticipating for the future of Maldives tourism?
As we mark 50 years, I am sure, as hosts, will be as flexible as we have been up to now. From early top markets such as Germany and Italy to the top 2019 market China, we have entertained tourists of various cultures. Current top markets are India and Russia.

There is a lot of talk about what the future is going to look like, and the overriding changes the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing about across sectors, particularly in the travel industry. What changes do you foresee in the global travel industry?
A person going on holiday with family or partner generally goes to a safe place. So holiday destinations, to ensure that, will have to have all their populations vaccinated, and when necessary boosters given. When this happens travel industry will revive.

When you look back at your days as the Minister of Tourism, is there any policies or strategy which you wish you had adopted or initiated?
I wish I had undertaken the task of convincing the President to enact a law through the Majlis to limit the intake of foreign staff to a maximum of 20% in any tourist establishment. Unfortunately, I didn't have the foresight of today’s staff ratio.

What has been your most memorable experience as the Minister of Tourism?
The warm welcome given by the staff members, some of whom had been with me in the department of Tourism and Foreign Investment, as I walked in with my crutches to the Ministry.

Any advice to the younger generation leading in this industry?
Facilitate the employment of more Maldivians in the hospitality industry, and if necessary, by training them in respective fields. Preservation of environment is very important. It is not making only speeches at international meetings but practicing what we preach at home not only at tourist places but in the whole country.
In the long run, successfully bringing together multiple generations can create a rich and diverse workforce that highlights the strengths of all employees and leads to growth and better productivity.
Arusal Noorie has been working in the tourism sector for the past 2 decades. After BTEC Diploma in Hotel & Hospitality Management, he began his hospitality career in 1998 as a waiter at Bandos Island Resort. Went abroad for further studies, graduated from EHL, Hotelfachschule, Passugg Switzerland Swiss College and was offered a job opportunity in the hospitality sector of the United Kingdom. He returned back to Maldives 5 years later, with immense knowledge and first hand experience and has been working at Bandos Island Resort since then. Over course of the 20 plus years, he worked his way up to top management level with dedication and commitment.

**What drew you to the hospitality industry? When and from where did you start?**

I grew up engaging in the nitty-gritty of running a family business. I like being busy and performing creative tasks. I possess a keen interest in traveling, seeing the world and meeting new people. After O/L results in 1997, my dad offered me three career choices namely a teacher; policeman or enroll in Hotel school for further study. I chose the hotel school option as it was the best way for me to explore the world. My dad supported my interest and guided me to enrol for the BTEC national diploma on hotel & hospitality management program.

**Tell us about your hospitality journey so far and how it has shaped you?**

Soon after my graduation in 1998, I joined Bandos Island Resort as a waiter. After working for 10 months, I was offered an outstanding opportunity to go to Switzerland for further study. Mr Deen generously sponsored my study program.

After graduating from EHL, Hotelfachschule, Passugg Switzerland, I got a job opportunity to work in the UK for two years.

I have been in the hotel industry for the last 24 years. So far, my journey has been incredible. The exposure I gained through the European hospitality context shaped me into who I am today. My knowledge and experience pushes me to perform with innovative work ideas.

You have been working at Bandos Islands Resort since 2005. What lead you to Bandos? Tell us about your role at the resort.

Upon graduation from Hotel school in 1998, I joined Bandos Maldives as a waiter. As the company sponsored my study abroad, I returned to Bandos in 2005 to complete the service bond of 3 years. Since then I have been working for the company. It has been my pleasure to serve the company which made me who I am today. Over the long run of 20+ years, I worked in different portfolios from junior level to executive management. My main role and the commitment to the company is to improve the service quality offered to our customers.

As the Deputy General Manager of the resort, what are you focusing on improving?

Though I'm in the top leadership role, most of my work is dedicated to being a resource for the management team. Currently, I am managing F&B operations while guiding the team to close the gap of working together and assist them to perform with passion and dedication.

Our industry has seen rise and fall in response to world events. However Covid 19 has caused business interruptions to a level that we have never imagined. The pandemic has thrown many challenges our way. We are forced to change the way we do business. As our engagement is in an established industry, we are familiar with this type of sudden disruption. However, the pandemic forced us to change and adapt to business processes faster than we've ever had to in the past. It was understood that long-term strategic plans had to be put aside and replaced with instantaneous decisions to keep up with the challenging dynamic business environment. Our business model runs through social connection which creates a high performing team. Prior to the pandemic, as team members, multiple socializing activities and investing in bonding time to connect with each other in genuine ways was how we lived. This ensured closer friendships and better teamwork. This pandemic, however, has forced us to work individually by maintaining physical distance, which has become an immense challenge as creating an environment where employees feel togetherness, and expressing positive and negative emotions with compliments is disrupted.

**How are you adapting to the new normal travel patterns?**

We're in the middle of a new wave of a pandemic that has killed millions. When COVID-19 hit deeper into our everyday lives, we were scared and uncertain about what our future holds for us. But we quickly adapted to the changing environment. I don't believe we have to invent anything new to get through this pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, we have been following international best practices in our operations. Specifically cleaning, disinfection and hygiene practices are very core exercises of our everyday lives in our operation.

**What has been the most challenging part of your hospitality career?**

In my early days of management, I had to implement changes to close service gaps and miscommunication in our operations. To get everyone on the same page and to implement changes was a difficult and time consuming task. It was challenging to convince experienced staff to change the way they used to work for long periods of time.

**What are your thoughts and views on the Maldives tourism industry?**

In 50 years of tourism in the Maldives, we have witnessed many changes and developments. The economic impact is huge and positively contributes to every corner of our daily lives. We successfully developed this industry with the hard work, sweat and tears of our pioneers. On this occasion, I would like to appreciate the hard work and dedication of our forefathers of the industry for bringing us this far.

Focussing on the current situation, I believe the greatest challenge that we are facing today is the covid-19 Pandemic. As we are living with lots of restrictions, the travel industry is no longer predictable. We need to redefine, refocus and change the game plan to move forward. The present scenario on regulations, health awareness, and social interactions will have long-lasting attitude effects on customer’s view of our services. We are already witnessing the change in customer’s mindset, to share the
We have many exciting activities and campaigns planned for the year.

What are your major concerns in this industry?
Pre-covid used to be just a few generations working together in harmony. However, now we are faced with numerous resignations and the highest turnover of staff in a short span of time. To keep up with growing demands of service expected by customers, we are forced to work with employees from different generations, each with their own motivations, experiences, and perspectives.

Managing employees with different priorities and creating an environment where all generations are valued and properly engaged to achieve a common goal can be challenging.

How can employers ensure that younger professionals are attracted to the hotel industry?
We are in need of a skilled labour force. There is a huge gap in supply and demand in hospitality labour market. The mindset of young professionals is very different from how they used to be 6-8 years ago. At present, every person and situation requires something different from you. To practice empathy and understanding each employee as an individual in order to adapt and know how to adjust to the work environment is an important factor. In the long run, successfully bringing together multiple generations can create a rich and diverse workforce that highlights the strengths of all employees and leads to growth and better productivity.

What is the driving force behind your success?
I believe what I succeeded in my life is the result of my hard work and endless support from my family. My wife and children are my biggest inspiration in life. They have been there for me to guide and lead me through challenges. In my adventure, I have made countless mistakes. But this is how anything worthwhile in life is conquered. By attempting and trying, you figure out what worked and didn’t work and you learn the lesson to move forward. Sometimes, occasional mistakes taught me the best lessons in life.
What leadership qualities do you wish to improve?
One of my strengths is that I am open to learning new things. Continuous learning is one of our corporate values. I live with it everyday in my leadership role. Perhaps one area that I have to work on is to identify what motivates different people to different things. End of the day what really matters is to manage the team to work together to achieve a common goal. As our workforce is young and spread across multiple nationalities, different people ignite performance differently. As a leader, I am responsible for bringing up underperforming team members to desired level of performance and maintaining their performance in a consistent way which is a challenge that I have worked on improving.

What would be your advice to the young locals entering this industry and aspire to be in leadership roles?
Good education and keen interest are important as it creates the foundation upon which you can build your life journey towards success. In a conventional setting, study comes first and then the practice. In tourism, however, the practice is all part of the study experience. The beauty of tourism is that it’s not entirely a book-based industry; it’s a very hands-on and creative industry. If you enjoy interacting daily with people and can think creatively in different situations, hospitality may be the best option. There will be a lot of people who would advise you on your career path. There is no harm in listening to feedback of course, but the important thing is to make your own decisions. Ultimately, you have to do what makes sense for you. Also You need to know your strengths and weaknesses. The more self-aware you become, the more growth and opportunities you’ll perceive.

Where do you see yourself in the next five years?
My Masters Degree in Tourism and Hospitality management, exposure gained in the international arena equipped me with the confidence and capability to excel successfully in every role I have performed in my career. I will keep on exploring and performing as my passion leads the way.

The beauty of tourism is that it’s not entirely a book-based industry; it’s a very hands-on and creative industry.
“Anywhere you go anywhere you work its ‘you’ who make the difference. My way of working is I try to perform together with them, not giving them the chance to say ‘she is a girl, she can’t do it.’
Zoonia Naseem
Owner
Moodhu Bulhaa Dive Center

Zoonia Naseem is the first Maldivian female to be certified as PADI Course Director and the second Maldivian to achieve the status. Course Director level is the highest professional rating for recreational scuba diving, according to PADI. Being a “Moodhu”, aka ocean person from a very tender age, she is the owner and co-founder of the “Moodhu Bulhaa Dive Centre”. She has trained a lot of locals into the professional level with the main focus given to increase the number of local female professionals in the dive field.

Where and how did you start your career from?
I am fortunate to have parents who absolutely loved the water, we were taught that the ocean is the safest and most fun place to be. That, I would say was the reason for my interest in the underwater life and choosing a career in diving. Did my very first dive and up to PADI Divemaster level in 1995 from Sun Diving School – Male’. After that I did PADI Instructor level in April 1996 from TGI Diving Centre Halaveli.

What inspired you to become a diver and a PADI professional?
Probably my first instructor was the inspiration and as a water friendly person the dive was really easy and I wanted to be that instructor. From the first dive itself I knew I wanted to become an Instructor. After the dive I did a bit of research and found there were no local female instructors, but there were so many European and Asian Instructors – so though why not

You are the first female PADI Course Director of the Maldives. How would you describe your journey so far?
I had always dreamed to progress in the career- Having the opportunity to represent just 2% of the dive industry was a dream coming true.

What challenges and the obstacles you had to overcome to get where you are today?
Initially it was a financial challenge as I did not have enough money to get to the level I want to, but I am not someone who likes to give up on things, rather I would figure out a way to achieve what I want.

You have your own dive training facility, Moodhu Bulhaa. Tell us about this facility. How and why did you come up with the idea?
With our first daughter, I left the resort as I wanted to be with her, so from that point onwards we were thinking of starting something on our own. After working 18 years in the tourism industry I believe we can do it. With the full support from my husband, our families and friends we decided to start with Moodhu Bulhaa Dive Centre at Vilimale. Officially opened on 8th March 2017 on International Women’s Day

“This is a great profession – you get to have a good time at the same time earn way much better than most of the jobs.”
How challenging is it to be at the top position of a male dominated sector?
To be honest I did not have any challenges to work in a male dominant industry, my male colleagues have always supported in my career. I guess anywhere you go anywhere you work its ‘you’ who make the difference. My way of working is I try to perform together with them, not giving them the chance to say ‘she is a girl, she can’t do it’.

What do you consider to be your greatest career achievement?
Having the opportunity to open a Dive Centre for the locals - the door for the local children and professional to learn diving is a great achievement for me. Also getting selected among the 5 for the ‘Ocean Awards’ by Boat International was rewarding. And finally, receiving National recognition and being featured on “CNN Reconnect” were definitely major highlights of my career.

What are your thoughts and views on the Maldives tourism industry?
No doubt tourism is the main income source to the Maldives and our fascinating marine world is one of the biggest attractions for the visitors to the Maldives. We all have to do our best to preserve and protect this beauty.

What changes do you wish to see in the hospitality industry, more specifically the diving sector, to make it more attractive and welcoming for local female job seekers?
Current hospitality industry and specially the resort environments are very well designed for both male/female workers. What needs to be changed is how the parents see it. They have to understand tourism industry is a safe place for females to work. Once a staff joins a resort they are well looked after and they are trained in various fields, they get exposed to work in different outlets, they learn to be independent, disciplined and learn what hospitality is. Similar to ‘hotel schools,’ wish there will be an opportunity to start a Marine School for the locals to come and lean diving and all sort of water sports.

What has been your most memorable diving experience?
Training a visually impaired local female is definitely one of the key achievements.

What are your favorite diving spots, in the Maldives?
I would say Maldives is one of the best dive destinations. We have the possibility to dive all year through, temperature remains at 28 degrees, great visibility, excellent marine life throughout the year. Having the opportunity to dive in comfortable clothing and gear is just so relaxing. I simply enjoy every dive. No matter where you do the dive, you will always get excellent fish life and amazing surprises. Personally, I like sharks, pelagic and ‘big stuff’, love channels with strong currents.

Would you recommend diving as a career path for local females, and become a certified PADI instructor?
Absolutely, I would say this is a great profession – you get to have a good time at the same time earn way much better than most of the jobs. In 6 months, you can become a PADI Instructor and start working as a professional. With the emerging middle east market there is a high demand for female diving instructors in the Maldives.

What would be your advice to the young women entering this industry aspiring to be in leadership roles?
If you have a will and goal, Insha Allah everything is achievable. I would say start from the scratch and then work out to be a leader.
What would be your advice to PADI Instructors hoping to become PADI Course Directors?
Course Director level is a level that comes in with lots of experience and training. You are becoming someone to train divers to Instructor level which is not a small thing. Be focused and work for it, you can do it.

What's next for you in your professional career?
My wish is to have a Marine School in Vilimale (as this is most dense area where most kids will have access to it) with a mobile dive school so we can go to other islands wherever needed to open the door for students who don't have the possibility to come to Male' for dive / snorkel training.

“Be focused and work for it, you can do it.”
In many careers, you study, and then you practice. The beauty of tourism is that it’s not a book-based industry; it’s very hands-on and creative.

Mohamed Musthansir Billah
Security and Risk Manager
Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives

What was your first hospitality job?
I started my hospitality career in 2018 as a risk supervisor in Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives. In 2020 I have been promoted to Assistant Risk Manager and today I work as the Security and Risk Manager of the resort.

Who and what inspired you to join Holiday in Kandooma Maldives?
I always had a desire to explore the tourism sector, the resignation from MNDF brought me to this job. I am extremely thankful to my previous manager Mr. Mohamed Ali who introduced me to this Brand InterContinental Hotel Group. Their strong values inspired me to continue working in this beautiful resort and I would say Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives is one of the best places to work.

How do you manage your daily work schedule? What is the best part of the job?
As a manager you need to balance the work, patience, leadership capabilities whilst demonstrating good characteristics helps you to have a good
day. It’s always important to acknowledge your priorities leading by example and having patience with staff and managing all the complaints leading to a flawless service as always expected. The best part of the job is a fulfilling role that will see you meet interesting people, grow as a person and live some unforgettable experiences.

What has been your most memorable experience from the hospitality industry so far?
I don’t have one single moment but I have many blessings in my life that have taken me to great places and met great people. My greatest moments at work have always been related to solving a problem or creating a solution for a customer. Landing my current job has been the best so far.

What challenges do young people face related to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the workplace have brought tremendous changes and confusion to work lives. When you have a diverse workforce, communication between team members becomes challenging. Language barriers make team members ineffectively communicate and have difficulties understanding one another. Failure to fully comprehend instructions could lead to a significant drop in productivity and team synergy. Too many opinions can compromise the organization’s ability to stick to tight deadlines due to this decreases productivity.

When an organization holds onto diverse employees just to boost diversity figures leads to ending up with poor performers, reducing productivity, morale and innovation.

Discrimination can hold employees back from bringing their authentic selves to work, hindering innovation, creativity, and teamwork.

As an enthusiastic young professional, how would you describe the tourism industry of the Maldives?
Working in tourism offers exotic or beautiful locations, modern working spaces, and a dynamic environment.

Employees are often young, bringing energy and a sense of fun to teams and workplaces. There are plenty of chances for personal and career growth – and to make a difference.

Are you enjoying resort life? What do you like most about this industry?
Yes, I do, the hospitality industry allows you to develop yourself – professionally and as a person. Not only do you improve on the professional skills you already possess, but with time and commitment, you learn others due to the variety of colleagues, clients, and situations that will put you to the test.

What do you miss most?
Stepping out of your comfort zone is never easy. Being away from home and loved ones is not easy. I miss them the most. As in the Quote by Rodrigo Santoro
“...The distance, being far away from your home, from your family, that’s not easy. There are times when you say, ‘Wow, what a fight, what a battle.’

What would be your advice to young locals entering the tourism industry?
A career in the tourism industry is the perfect fit for those with a desire to learn and an ambition to go above and beyond. In many careers, you study, and then you practice. The beauty of tourism is that it’s not a book-based industry; it’s very hands-on and creative. The good news for you is that no matter where your strengths lie, or what your passions are, you should be able to find a position that suits your unique talents.

Where do you see yourself in the next five years from now?
I am truly blessed to have a wonderful leader (Executive Assistant Manager Hussain Shahid) as my mentor who has drawn a personalized training approach that will allow me to learn new skills and grow within this position over the next few years. I’m excited about the opportunities this job would provide me, as I believe they will support my long-term career goals and allow me to grow within this industry.

The best part of the job is a fulfilling role that will see you meet interesting people, grow as a person and live some unforgettable experiences.
CRUNCHING NUMBERS

Tourist Arrivals

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<td>January</td>
<td>151,552</td>
<td>173,347</td>
<td>92,103</td>
<td>-39.2</td>
<td>2,971</td>
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<td>February</td>
<td>168,583</td>
<td>149,785</td>
<td>96,882</td>
<td>-42.5</td>
<td>3,460</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>162,843</td>
<td>59,630</td>
<td>109,585</td>
<td>-32.7</td>
<td>3,355</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>163,114</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>91,200</td>
<td>-44.1</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>103,022</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>64,613</td>
<td>-37.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>113,475</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56,166</td>
<td>-50.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>132,144</td>
<td>1,752</td>
<td>101,818</td>
<td>-22.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9.1</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>139,338</td>
<td>7,836</td>
<td>143,599</td>
<td>+3.1</td>
<td>+1,780.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>117,619</td>
<td>9,605</td>
<td>114,896</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>+1,096.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>141,928</td>
<td>21,515</td>
<td>142,066</td>
<td>+0.1</td>
<td>+560.3</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>137,921</td>
<td>35,757</td>
<td>144,725</td>
<td>+4.9</td>
<td>+304.7</td>
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<td>December</td>
<td>171,348</td>
<td>96,412</td>
<td>164,279</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
<td>+70.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>1,702,887</td>
<td>555,494</td>
<td>1,321,932</td>
<td>-22.4</td>
<td>+138.0</td>
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2021: 1,321,932 (↑ +138% y-o-y)
2020: 555,494 (↓ -67.4% y-o-y)
2019: 1,702,887 (↑ +14.7% y-o-y)

Tourist Arrivals by Regions

(Arrivals and Growth Rate Year-on-Year)

AMERICAS
- 2019: 84,794 (+23.3%)
- 2020: 32,060 (-62.2%)
- 2021: 88,910 (+173.3% as at end December)

EUROPE
- 2019: 833,939 (+14.8%)
- 2020: 348,349 (-58.2%)
- 2021: 772,460 (+121.7% as at end December)

AFRICA
- 2019: 18,695 (+21.8%)
- 2020: 6,458 (-65.5%)
- 2021: 27,442 (+324.9% as at end December)

MIDDLE EAST
- 2019: 60,003 (+15.1%)
- 2020: 26,288 (-56.2%)
- 2021: 91,413 (+2477% as at end December)

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
- 2019: 705,140 (+13.5%)
- 2020: 142,243 (-79.8%)
- 2021: 341,395 (+140.0% as at end December)

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ToP 10 Markets by Nationality
(as at end December 2021)

1. **India** 22.1% Shares
   - 291,787 arrivals +363.4% over 2020

2. **Russia** 16.8% Shares
   - 222,422 arrivals +262.3% over 2020

3. **Germany** 7.2% Shares
   - 95,358 arrivals +161.7% over 2020

4. **U.K.** 4.7% Shares
   - 62,777 arrivals +191.1% over 2020

4. **U.S.A.** 4.2% Shares
   - 55,760 arrivals +182.2% over 2020

6. **Saudi Arabia** 3.0% Shares
   - 40,014 arrivals +428.0% over 2020

7. **Spain** 2.8% Shares
   - 37,354 arrivals +451.1% over 2020

8. **Ukraine** 2.7% Shares
   - 35,073 arrivals +239.1% over 2020

9. **France** 2.3% Shares
   - 30,068 arrivals +7.3% over 2020

10. **Italy** 2.1% Shares
    - 27,309 arrivals -41.5% over 2020

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ToP 10 ARRIVALS by Country of Residence
(as at end December 2021)

1. **241,983** arrivals from **India**
   - 97.7% of arrivals were Indians

2. **208,072** arrivals from **Russia**
   - 98.6% of arrivals were Russians

3. **86,170** arrivals from **Germany**
   - 91.3% of arrivals were Germans

4. **60,712** arrivals from **U.A.E**
   - 22.0% of arrivals were Emiratis

5. **50,859** arrivals from **U.S.A**
   - 88.9% of arrivals were Americans

8. **49,829** arrivals from **U.K**
   - 86.3% of arrivals were Brits

6. **45,936** arrivals from **Saudi Arabia**
   - 79.2% of arrivals were Saudis

7. **36,811** arrivals from **Spain**
   - 91.1% of arrivals were Spaniards

9. **30,904** arrivals from **Ukraine**
   - 97.5% of arrivals were Ukrainians

10. **29,488** arrivals from **Switzerland**
    - 73.4% of arrivals were Swiss
Airlines Operating to the Maldives

(December 2021)

SCHEDULED 23  CHARTERED 5

EUROPE
- AEROFLOT
- AUSTRIAN AIRLINES
- AZUR AIR RUSSIA
- BRITISH AIRWAYS
- BLUE PANORAMA
- CONDOR
- EDELWEISS
- LUFTHANSA
- NEOS
- TURKISH AIRLINES

MIDDLE EAST
- EMIRATES
- ETIHAD AIRWAYS
- FLY DUBAI
- GULF AIR
- QATAR AIRWAYS
- SAUDI ARABIAN AIRLINES

OTHERS
- SINGAPORE AIRLINES
- SRILANKAN AIRLINES
- AIR SEYCHELLES
- MONGOLIAN AIRLINES
- US-BANGLA AIRLINES

INDIA
- AIR INDIA
- GOAIR
- INDIGO
- SPICEJET
- AIR VISTARA

SCHEDULED
- AIR ASTANA
- LOT POLISH AIRLINES
- GULLIVAIR

Chartered
- ETIHAD AIRWAYS
- FLY DUBAI
- GULF AIR
- QATAR AIRWAYS
- SAUDI ARABIAN AIRLINES
- SINGAPORE AIRLINES
- SRILANKAN AIRLINES
- AIR SEYCHELLES
- MONGOLIAN AIRLINES
- US-BANGLA AIRLINES
- AIR VISTARA
Tourist Facilities
(In Operation as at end December 2021)

Total Capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Capacity</th>
<th>Beds</th>
<th>Nos.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resorts</strong></td>
<td>53,160</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotels</strong></td>
<td>38,226</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guesthouses</strong></td>
<td>1,360</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safaris</strong></td>
<td>10,716</td>
<td>613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beds</strong></td>
<td>2,858</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H.A. ATOLL
- 2 Resorts: 394 Beds
- 1 Hotel: 0 Beds
- 11 Guesthouses: 130 Beds

H.D.H. ATOLL
- 1 Resort: 118 Beds
- 1 Hotel: 104 Beds
- 1 Guesthouse: 102 Beds

R. ATOLL
- 14 Resorts: 3,554 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 2 Guesthouses: 22 Beds

B. ATOLL
- 16 Resorts: 3,320 Beds
- 1 Hotel: 150 Beds
- 3 Guesthouses: 682 Beds

A.A. ATOLL
- 11 Resorts: 2,224 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 12 Guesthouses: 1,548 Beds

A.D.H. ATOLL
- 16 Resorts: 4,200 Beds
- 1 Hotel: 56 Beds
- 7 Guesthouses: 964 Beds

F. ATOLL
- 1 Resort: 260 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 7 Guesthouses: 84 Beds

DH. ATOLL
- 8 Resorts: 2,794 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 4 Guesthouses: 82 Beds

TH. ATOLL
- 1 Resort: 152 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 4 Guesthouses: 56 Beds

G.DH. ATOLL
- 3 Resorts: 550 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 6 Guesthouses: 92 Beds

SH. ATOLL
- 2 Resorts: 457 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 3 Guesthouses: 24 Beds

N. ATOLL
- 0 Resorts: 2,160 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 6 Guesthouses: 64 Beds

L.H. ATOLL
- 10 Resorts: 2,504 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 4 Guesthouses: 44 Beds

K. ATOLL
- 53 Resorts: 12,314 Beds
- 9 Hotels: 760 Beds
- 23 Guesthouses: 5,612 Beds

V. ATOLL
- 4 Resorts: 694 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 49 Guesthouses: 586 Beds

M. ATOLL
- 2 Resorts: 440 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 3 Guesthouses: 30 Beds

L. ATOLL
- 2 Resorts: 342 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 3 Guesthouses: 138 Beds

G.A. ATOLL
- 6 Resorts: 1,279 Beds
- 1 Hotel: 144 Beds
- 6 Guesthouses: 48 Beds

GN. ATOLL
- 0 Resorts: 0 Beds
- 0 Hotels: 0 Beds
- 17 Guesthouses: 206 Beds

S. ATOLL
- 1 Resort: 260 Beds
- 1 Hotel: 156 Beds
- 13 Guesthouses: 222 Beds

Photo by Ria Canton Maldives

Maldives Tourism Bulletin
Maldives participated in the 24th UNWTO General Assembly held in Madrid, from 30th November to 3rd December 2021. The Maldives delegation was headed by Minister of Tourism, Honorable Dr. Abdulla Mausoom and comprised of Ambassador of Belgium Honorable Mr. Hassan Sobir, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Tourism, Ms. Fathimath Nilfa and Executive Director Ms. Fazeela Ali. The General Assembly has brought together more than 1,000 delegates from 135 countries, including 84 Ministers of Tourism as well as business leaders, destinations and representatives of key international organizations.

This was the first truly global tourism meeting to be held since the start of the pandemic, with innovation, education and investments high on the agenda. The UNWTO General Assembly showed the sector’s determination to restart, lead recovery and be a central pillar of sustainable development and climate action. Members from every global region approved the Organization’s Programme of Work and endorsed key initiatives designed to build a more a resilient, inclusive and sustainable tourism.

UNWTO opened the General Assembly with an Induction Session for the International Code for the Protection of Tourists. Held within the framework of the General Assembly, Affiliate members met for their 43rd Plenary Session, in which delegates approved the proposed Reform of the Legal Framework for UNWTO Affiliate Membership which will pave the way for more effective collaboration.

At the third day of the 24th UNWTO General Assembly, Minister of Tourism, Hon. Dr. Abdulla Mausoom represented Maldives at the “Youth Meets Ministers Debate”. This was one of the ministerial debates under a special Thematic Session “Building for the Future: Innovation, Education and Rural Development”. Discussions focused on empowering the tourism leaders of the future, with reference to the UNWTO Students’ League, featuring contributions from the Ministers of Tourism for Bulgaria, Lebanon, Maldives and Oman, as well as students themselves. Participants also discussed the challenges faced in community-based tourism & opportunities for youth in the tourism industry.
Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom attended the Global Citizen's forum held from 12-13th December in Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates. The Forum explored the theme ‘The Future in Motion’ where the topics were focused on global opportunities and challenges, human mobility for tourism and economic diversification, female and youth empowerment. Minister was accompanied by Senior Executive Director Mr. Abdulla Mohamed and Ms. Fathmath Niusha, Communications Director at the Ministry of Tourism

Maldives Secures “World's Leading Destination” Title at World Travel Awards 2021

Maldives secured the World's Leading Destination title at World Travel Awards 2021. The announcement was made at the WTA 2021 ceremony held virtually on 16th December 2021. Maldives won the title by competing against 18 destinations including Dubai, Indonesia, Spain, Vietnam, USA and Greece. World Travel Awards is recognized globally as the ultimate hallmark of industry excellence.

Congratulations to the Maldives tourism industry partners, employees & stakeholders on winning the World's Leading Destination World Travel Awards 2021 once again! We thank all our visitors in trusting us and coming back to our beautiful country.
Maldives Launches Homestay Tourism

The Maldives Tourist Guesthouse regulation was amended to allow homestay tourism in local islands. The amended regulation was published on gazette, paving way for the introduction of homestays, a new tourism product in the Maldives, which is expected to diversify the tourism sector. With this regulation, private homes in local islands will be allowed to accommodate tourists in their homes under the homestay model. The regulation includes the guidelines for the homestays as well as the responsibilities delegated to the island council to regulate homestay tourism. Homestay licenses will be issued to establishments with 1-5 rooms and will be taxable at the rate of 3 US dollars per day, the same rate as guesthouses.

The Deputy Minister of Tourism, Mr. Assad Riza, Senior Policy Directors Mr. Ibrahim Farhad and Mr. Mohamed Khussan and Senior Executive Director Mr. Ali Razzan, joined a press conference on 28th December to brief on the newly introduced homestay tourism project.

Under this new concept, the first facility registered as homestay was Moorithi house with 6 beds in Meemu Atoll Dhiggaru, an island famous for their Rihaakuru. A special ceremony was held on 1st January 2022 in Dhiggaru to inaugurate the homestay tourism. In this ceremony, Minister of Tourism presented the operating license to the owner of the house, Mohamed Ahmed. The residents of Dhiggaru warmly welcomed the first five tourists to the homestay with traditional performances and a water salute. The first tourists to the homestay were two couples from the U.S and Sudan, and Ms. Catherine Haswell, the UN Resident Coordinator for the Republic of Maldives. The ceremony was attended by the Managing Director of FENAKA Ahmed Saeed, President of Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATATO) Mr. Abdulla Suood, President of Guesthouse Association (GAM), Mr. Abdulla Nasheed, and senior officials from the Tourism Ministry.

Imaam Training Programme for Resort Employees Concluded

The closing ceremony of the Imaam training programme for resort employees was held on 8th December 2021. The chief guest of this ceremony was the Minister of Tourism, Honorable Dr. Abdulla Mausoom. This programme was conducted by Ministry of Islamic Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism with the intent of developing Imams based in tourist resorts. A total of 87 participants from 9 batches successfully completed the programme.
During the month of December several International dignitaries paid courtesy calls on the Minister of Tourism.

On the 7th of December, the newly appointed Non-Resident Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to Maldives, Her Excellency Hayet Talbi paid a courtesy call on Minister of Tourism, Honorable Dr. Abdulla Mausoom on 7th December 2021. Discussions were focused on tourism cooperation between Tunisia and Maldives.

On 7th of December, Minister of Tourism, Honorable Dr. Abdulla Mausoom received a courtesy call from The Ambassador of Austria to the Republic of Maldives, Her Excellency Katharina Weiser on 7th December 2021. Discussions were focused on tourism cooperation between the Austria and the Maldives.

On 16th of December, the new High Commissioner of Malta to Maldives, His Excellency Reuben Gauci, paid a courtesy call on the Minister of Tourism, Honorable Dr. Abdulla Mausoom on 15th December 2021. They discussed the opportunities and challenges for small island states in the field of tourism and collaborated to work closely on these issues.
Island Council Members Meet with Minister of Tourism

During the month of December, island council members from Gaafu Alifu Kolamafushi Council and Haa Dhaalu Nolhivarafaru Council visited the Ministry of Tourism and met with the Minister and the Ministry's Diversification Team on 9th December 2021.

For the meeting with Gaafu Alifu Kolamafushi island council, Council President Ibrahim Waheed and the council members joined. Discussions during this meeting were focused on tourism development in Kolamaafushi.

The members of Haa Dhaalu (H.Dh.) Nolhivarafaru Council were headed by the council President Abdulla Nadeem Discussions, of the meeting were focused on tourism development options and the proposed tourism training hotel at H.Dh. Nolhivarafaru.

Tourism Diversification and Localization Team Visits Vaavu Atoll

The Ministry of Tourism's Diversification and localization team visited islands of Vaavu atoll from 18th to 19th December 2021.

On 18th December the team visited V. Rakeedhoo and V. Keyodhoo, accompanied by Vaavu atoll Council president, Shajau Ali and Keyodhoo constituency MP, Hussain Gasim. On 19th December 2021, the team concluded their trip by visiting V. Feliadhoo and V. Fulidhoo along with Vaavu atoll Council president, Shujau Ali and MP for Keyodhoo constituency, Hussain Gasim.

In all the islands, the team met with the respective islands, Island Council, Women's Development Committee and entrepreneurs. Discussions navigated tourism development and options for community-based tourism. The team also visited touristic sites.
Visit Maldives Launched a Campaign with American Express

A campaign has been launched with American Express's Travel Impression. Under the campaign, a brochure consisting of information about the Maldives will be circulated to affluent cardholders of American Express starting from 26th November. The campaign aims to target 4500 Centurion card holders in German and Austrian market where they will advertise Maldives through a brochure containing the luxurious properties of Maldives. Travel Impressions is the vacations collection brand for American Express. They are exclusively contracted for the American Express to reach premium Card Members, receiving top-tier benefits. Their online product directory is uploaded on American Express websites and/or in American Express Smart Phone Apps.

Visit Maldives Holds a Webinar for Nordic Region

On 30th November, visit Maldives held a webinar ‘Unique experiences of the Maldives’ for travel trade form the Nordic region. The session lasted one hour with industry partners including Canopus Maldives and Centara Hotels & Resorts joining visit Maldives. The webinar is held for the Nordic travel trade, in order to provide them with the latest information and travel guidelines from the destination. The webinar series aims to inspire the Nordic travel trade to broaden and extend their Maldives product portfolio. This is the second session of a series of webinars organized by MMPRC. The first session was held in September 2021, under the title, ‘Connect with Maldives, Your safe Haven’.

Maldives Participates ILTM Cannes 2021 in France

Maldives is promoted at the global luxury event, ILTM Cannes 2021, in France. The event will be held from 6th to 9th December 2021. ILTM Cannes France is a trade show with pre-scheduled appointments, educational sessions, networking and entertainment. This travel and tourism event in France provides the perfect business opportunities and access to qualified and relevant travel buyers, influencers, and market professionals. Exhibiting at ILTM Cannes brings in the unique opportunity to magnify businesses in the region by giving unique access to new contacts as much as fortifying the relationship with existing ones. ILTM Cannes 2021 is expected to attract international visitors from over 95 countries.
Visit Maldives Kicks off Marketing Campaign with TUI

Visit Maldives kicks off a major marketing campaign targeting the German market with TUI held from 29th November 2021 till 3rd April 2022. This campaign will include advertising, press releases, newsletters, social media activities, trade communications with dedicated emails distributed to the partners and clientele of TUI Austria. These advertising and dedicated content will promote Maldives as a safe haven, emphasizing on the geographical formation of our scattered islands which offer natural social distancing. The campaign will focus on marketing the Maldivian tourism products (resorts, hotels, guesthouses and liveaboards), the experiences unique to the Maldives, and the stringent measures in place at our properties. Latest information about the destination will be relayed to travel trade and tourists from the German market through this campaign.

Visit Maldives Participates in the USTOA Annual Conference

Visit Maldives participated in the 2021 USTOA Annual Conference & Marketplace which took place from 7th to 10th December at the Manchester Grand Hyatt in San Diego, CA. Visit Maldives was represented at the event by their PR agency representatives. The objective of participating in this event is to market the destination as a safe haven, to inform travel trade from the USA about the latest destination information and travel guidelines. Furthermore, the event provided a platform to promote the different segments of tourism available in the Maldives, including luxury and budget travel options for those seeking to travel for honeymoon, romantic, family vacations or even business purposes involving MICE activities.

Outdoor Advertising Campaign Kicked off with Mediamond of Italy

An outdoor advertising campaign kicked off with Mediamond in Italy to increase brand presence for the Maldives. The joint campaign between Visit Maldives and Mediamond will be held in two phases, for 3 weeks in December 2021 and 1 week in January 2022. During this campaign, Maldives will be displayed in 6 strategic areas in Milan. This will assist in creating awareness on different segments of tourism in Maldives including romance, wellness, luxury, diving and watersports. It aims to maintain a strong market presence at a time where other island destinations have also become open to Italian travelers.
MMPRC Launches “Thasveeru: Maldives Through Art” Exhibition

Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation, MMPRC launched an art exhibition on Saturday, 04th December. The exhibition named “Thasveeru: Maldives through art” was held in Hulhumale Central Park. The exhibition hub will run till the end of the year and will be managed by HDC. A special ceremony was held to commemorate the opening of the exhibition, attended by representatives of MMPRC and HDC. The attendees were able to take a tour of the exhibition, which was followed by children’s activities.

The exhibition comprises of 12 winning pieces of the “Thasveeru: Maldives Through Art” competition, held in collaboration with the Maldivian Artist Community, MAC from 15th July to 15th August 2021. The aim in creating an exhibition corner at Central Park was to create a platform for artists to display their artwork. It also supports our effort to enhance the profile of Hulhumale as a tourist spot by creating tourist attractions.

‘Reconnect with Maldives’ Program Aired on CNN

As part of the ongoing global campaign by Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), ‘Reconnect with Maldives’ program was aired on CNN on 11th and 12th December 2021. The 30-minute program was aired 4 times on CNN international’s Europe, Middle East Africa, Asia Pacific, South Asia, North America and Latin America feeds.

Through this programme viewers got a glimpse of what visitors can expect in the Maldives, such as local food and life within the local communities. It also featured the work of Manta Trust and Reescapers, the first local female PADI course instructor, a local chef and the all women boduberu group “Faimini Boduberu Group.” Reconnect with Maldives video is also posted on CNN’s social media platforms.

Maldives Halal Travel Represented at the 8th Edition of OIC Halal Expo 2021

Maldives Halal Travel (MHT) has been represented at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), 8th edition of OIC Halal Expo 2021 at the Istanbul Congress Center (ICC) from the 25th to 28th of November 2021.

Dr. Hussain Sunny Umar represented MHT at the 8th OIC Halal Expo. Backed up by his academic knowledge, expertise in developing new products, and the support of MMPRC and the Ministry of Tourism- He has ambitious plans to penetrate the halal market.
Vakkaru Maldives Voted World’s Leading Luxury Honeymoon Resort

By: Vakkaru Maldives

Vakkaru Maldives retained its title as the World’s Leading Luxury Honeymoon Resort at the 28th World Travel Awards 2021. It first won the accolade in 2020. The latest award is the fifth one it has won this year.

The 28th annual awards follow a year-long search for the world’s top travel, tourism and hospitality brands. Votes for the awards are cast by travel industry professionals and the public and the coveted World winners represent the absolute best in global travel.

Since opening its door in December 2017, Vakkaru Maldives has created memorable luxury experiences for travelers seeking the ultimate beach escape. Commenting on the

Iain McCormack, General Manager, Vakkaru Maldives, said: “We are delighted with this latest accolade. It is a validation of our dedication to creating exceptional stay experiences combined with our signature hospitality for our guests. Couples, in particular, are always looking for something that sparks the imagination and occasions to reconnect and discover themselves. We look forward to being the catalyst for couples to connect and make precious memories together.”
Six Senses Laamu Receives Gold Award for Reducing Plastic Waste

By: Six Senses Laamu

The WTM (World Travel Media) Responsible Tourism Awards recognizes responsible tourism practices and initiatives that inspire others and are replicable across the travel and tourism industry. The award aims to showcase great examples of responsible tourism in practice so we can use them to educate others, including consumers, about what can be achieved and to challenge others to do as well or better.

At this year’s World Travel Market, which took place in early November in London, Six Senses Laamu was announced as the winners for both the regional and global competitions for their efforts in Reducing Plastic Waste in the Environment. The international judging panel said they were impressed with the extensive range of ways in which the resort has worked to reduce the use of plastics in the resort and to reengineer their supply chain to eliminate plastic.

Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas has a goal to be plastic-free by 2022 and at Six Senses Laamu we are close to achieving this goal. Over the years, the resort has increased the produce produced on-island and the products which are upcycled to minimize plastic packaging and waste. The resorts’ Leaf Garden provides 40 different herbs and greens, and the ‘Kukulhu Village’ provides eggs for the restaurants.

For produce which can’t be produced on the island, the purchasing team gives preference to local suppliers and engages them in providing plastic-free packaging. They purchase fruit and vegetables from local agricultural islands and fish from a coalition of local fishers who have signed a sustainable reef fishing code of conduct- a project which was also recognized in this year’s WTM Responsible Tourism Awards.

If suppliers believe plastic free packaging is not possible, the Six Senses Laamu purchasing team provides them with solutions through the likes of Biobiene's Thermoboxes- cardboard boxes lined internally with panels made of hemp, jute, and wood fibers, which provide the same insulation properties as Styrofoam, yet are 100% biodegradable and compostable.

Beyond this, fifty per cent of water sales in all restaurant outlets at the resort go into a fund providing clean, reliable drinking water to local communities. With thanks to this fund, Six Senses Laamu has installed enough water filters (97) in Laamu atoll to eliminate over 6.8 million plastic water bottles every year.

The MUI team also runs educational programs in schools, regular beach cleans and awareness sessions to educate and empower Laamu’s community on the importance of reducing plastic waste. Members of Laamu's community can apply for funding for sustainable projects, including those which reduce plastic waste, through the resort’s sustainability fund.
Qatar Airways Celebrates 20th Anniversary of Flying to Maldives

To mark the 20th Anniversary of Qatar Airways flying to the Maldives, Maldives Airport Company Limited held a special function to welcome the day’s first flight. The Qatar Airways flight was welcomed with a water salute and boduberu at Velana International Airport. Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, attended the ceremony and congratulated Qatar team and thanked them for their contribution towards the tourism industry in Maldives.
Nordwind Airlines Commences Direct Flights to Maldives

One of the biggest airlines in Russia, Nordwind Airlines, commences direct flights to Maldives. The first flight arrived to Velana International Airport (VIA) on 26th December and were warmly welcomed by Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL). The airline’s charter flights will operate between Russia’s St. Petersburg and VIA, with weekly flights scheduled every Sunday.
Sri Lankan Airlines Resumes Flights to Gan International Airport

Sri Lankan Airlines, the National Carrier of Sri Lanka resumed operations to Gan Island, the gateway to explore Southernmost atolls of the Maldives. Sri Lankan Airline is scheduled to operate weekly flights to Gan International Airport every Saturday. The airline received a water canon salute at Gan Island as the first and the only international airline operating to Gan international airport. The tourists in the first flight were warmly welcomed at Gan International Airport with a traditional boduberu performance and refreshments.
“Uligamu Masfihun”
The Great Maldivian Barbeque

By: Aminath Manal Musthafa

The island of Ulligan is located in Haa Alifu atoll, the northern tip of Maldives. Uligan, inhabited by around 300 people is also an outpost in the northwest Indian ocean, where yachts and vessels stop to rest and refuel, before entering the Gulf of Aden or Red Sea. This island has a unique tradition dating over 30 years; one which has amazed not just locals, but plenty of foreigners alike. Every year, all the islanders of Uligan come together for a grand fish barbeque.

Locals recall this barbeque starting during the 1980’s to celebrate the end of Ramadan. Recently, the barbeque date is decided by the community, after factoring in the monsoon season and the holidays. “This was something which started off very small” tells Muaz, the President of the Uligan Council. “Now the barbeque has grown into a great festivity and there’s an immense support from the locals” he further adds. It has grown to be the largest annual barbeque event in the Maldives, popularly known as “Uligamu Masfihun”.

The people of Uligan are kind and exceptionally hospitable, and as expected, makes sure that no one is left out for this event, whether it be a local or a visitor. At the time of this barbeque, all the visitors in Uligan are welcomed with open arms.

“Uligamu masfihun” is a work of art and community spirit. Every member in the community plays an important role in the success of this event. Preparations for the barbeque start days before the actual event. Firstly, the island council forms a steering committee with leaders, who are tasked to coordinate the event. Next the event is discussed with the island community, who are then divided into groups which handle different tasks. These tasks vary from fishing, cooking, and seasoning the fishes, to managing the fire to name a few.

When the day of barbeque starts to approach, the community gets on with the task of gathering the items needed for the
barbeque. A group of men sets off to collect firewood from the forest. As these men get to work, chunks of wood are sawed and split neatly, enough to provide for the almost 100ft long grill. Additionally, stems of coconut palm leaves are cut and sharpened to make a natural skewer to hold the fish on the grill.

On the day of barbeque, all islanders begin their day at the crack of dawn. After the Fajr prayer, around 3 boats carrying some men folk in the island venture out to the sea to catch fish for this grand barbeque. Before the boats leave, women see off these boats and hand them a “keyn” (a Maldivian feast) consisting of “Saagu fani” and “Bodu Bis”, two specialties of the island. These boats are free to catch varieties of reef fish and are given an arrival time.

When the boats leave, the preparations for the cooking begins. The women folk of Uligan take charge to prepare the special spice mix used to marinate the fishes. As the skillfully prepared spice mix begins to take form, the Uligan island fills up with its sweet aroma. In large pots, the Maldivian rice porridge “Bondibah” are stirred to perfection and Maldivian flat bread “Roshi” is prepared meticulously.

By evening, the boats slowly start to return to the island, presenting scaled and cleaned freshly caught fish. By then, the fishes are ready to be seasoned with the aromatic spice mix the women had prepared earlier. While one group seasons, another group sticks the seasoned fishes through the palm skewers. The group handling the grill lights the fire and finally, the barbeque starts.

About 500 fishes are carefully lined up in the fire and slowly grilled. Interestingly, this is enough for everybody in the community, and everyone gets their own fish to eat. Along with this delicious fish, guests have the option of choosing the desired sides from Bondibah to Maldivian flat bread. As soon as the islanders start eating, their faces start beaming with happiness, as everything tastes extremely fresh and flavorful.

The end of the barbeque is a joyful moment for the community. The atmosphere is lively, and islanders find the fruit of their labor extremely rewarding, after days of planning. The people of Uligan enjoys the barbeque and compliments each other for their hard work. Though it had been a tiring day, everyone in the community has done their part excellently. This event truly is a community effort. And another year passes by in upholding a long-held custom of “Uligamu Masfihun”, an exemplary work of unity and an essence of unique Maldivian culture from “Nala Nala Raajee”.

“This was something which started off very small. Now the barbeque has grown into a great festivity and there’s an immense support from the locals.”