Maldives

tourism bulletin

Highlights Conversations Updates

June 2021 | Volume - 06

Maldives 50

GOLDEN YEAR OF TOURISM 2022

MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

Maldives
the sunny side of life

WORLD TRAVEL AWARDS WINNER

Safe travels

For tourism to function as a tourist activity and things to be back to normal, we have to get vaccinated, vaccination is the way forward

– Dr. Abdulla Mausoom
Minister of Tourism, Maldives

Photo by: COMO Hotels / COMO Maalifushi

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Where there is Tourism there is hope

- H.E. Zurab Pololikashvili
Secretary General of the UNWTO

Photo by: The Nautilus Maldive

DID YOU KNOW ?

Shark feeding is prohibited in the Maldives!

"As responsible divers, reasonable care should be taken to protect the marine environment, its associated living organisms and their habitats. Divers should be briefed by the dive instructor on responsible behavior whilst diving, such as buoyancy control, avoiding damage to corals and physical contact with marine animals. Shark feeding is NOT permitted for the divers and the dive center staff alike."

– Maldives Recreational Diving Regulation, point (1), Section 13

Photo by: COMO Hotels & Resorts

Photo by: COMO Hotels & Resorts - COMO Cocoa Island

Managing Tourist Travel Movements During COVID-19: the split-stays

Travelling has become a huge challenge across the globe due to the current global pandemic. The challenges are more complex and tougher for countries like the Maldives where the islands are scattered across the ocean. The Maldives offers verities of accommodation options to its visitors, ranging from resort islands to live-aboard cruise boats. "Split-stay" has been a common occurrence in the Maldives even before the pandemic as tourists visiting the Maldives love to hop from one facility to the other during their stay, enjoying the beautiful islands and services offered in different facilities. This requires numerous amounts of travel movements between the facilities. The re-opening of Maldives borders for international tourists in July 2020, commenced with strong precautionary measures against COVID-19 spread in the country, one of which was limiting tourist movements between islands and facilities. Tourists were only allowed to stay at one registered tourist facility in the Maldives per visit. This led to many challenges for tourist facilities and tourists wishing to explore different aspects of the Maldives and the services available. To address these challenges the Ministry of Tourism, with guidance and advice from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) of the Maldives has been taking several measures.

The current procedure set in place for tourist "split-stay" is simple. Tourist facilities are required to fill a declaration form and submit it to the Ministry of Tourism. Additionally, facilities are also required to submit a health screening form for the tourists, as per Annex-5 of the guideline on "Public Health Interventions to prevent COVID-19 Transmission in the Tourism Sector" and the movements can start right away. No additional approvals are required. All parties involved however, should keep in mind and adhere to the health procedures and guidelines announced by the government of Maldives.

The declaration form is a one-off signed agreement made between the two tourist facilities where the tourist movements will take place. What is important to note is that there are four key conditions to these split-stays, violations to which could result in the immediate suspension of travel movements to and from the respective tourist facilities and temporary suspension of the approval issued by the Ministry of Tourism to operate the facility in accordance with the "Guideline for Restarting Tourism in Maldives". To begin with, it is a mandatory requirement for all tourist facilities to maintain and update the logs of these movements of each tourist as stated in Annex-5 of the aforementioned public health guideline. In addition, tourists should not be allowed to leave the facility on a split-stay movement while in isolation, quarantine, has fever or develop any COVID-19 related symptoms. Moreover, facilities should not undertake any tourist movements if the tourist facility is declared as an "ongoing contact tracing" or "community spread" site by HPA. And finally, tourist facilities must make an alternative arrangement for the tourist if the status of the facility changes while the tourists are on their way to the facility on a split stay.

At a time when social norms are challenged by a global health crisis, it is important for all to work together and follow the procedures and guidelines set forth by the Authorities. The declaration form can be downloaded from the Ministry of Tourism website and completed forms are to be submitted via email to splitstay@tourism.gov.mv

Tourism must be for the long run

– Mr. Niall Gibbons
Chief Executive, Tourism Ireland

Photo by: COMO Hotels / COMO Maalifushi

CRUNCHING NUMBERS

TOURIST ARRIVALS

2019 JANUARY-DECEMBER — Total Arrivals ▲ (+14.7%) **1,702,887**

2020 JANUARY-DECEMBER — Total Arrivals ▼ (-67.4%) **555,494**

2021 JANUARY - MAY — Total Arrivals ▲ (+18.7%) **454,383**

ARRIVALS	Arrivals 2019	Arrivals 2020	2021	Growth (%) 2021/2019	Growth (%) 2021/2020	Daily Average 2021	Duration of Stay 2021 (days)
January	151,552	173,347	92,103	-39.2	-46.9	2,971	9.2
February	168,583	149,785	96,882	-42.5	-35.3	3,460	8.8
March	162,843	59,630	109,585	-32.7	+83.8	3,355	8.7
April	163,114	13	91,200	-44.1	N/A	3,040	9.3
May	103,022	41	64,613	-37.3	N/A	2,084	9.1
Total	749,114	382,816	454,383	-39.3	+18.7	3,009	9.0

REGIONAL TRENDS

AMERICAS
2019 ▲ (+23.3%) 84,794
2020 ▼ (-62.2%) 32,060
2021 ▲ (+32.2%) (as at end May) 24,747

EUROPE
2019 ▲ (+14.8%) 833,939
2020 ▼ (-58.2%) 348,349
2021 ▲ (+25.8%) (as at end May) 300,710

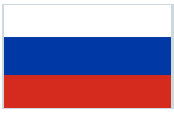
AFRICA
2019 ▲ (+21.8%) 18,695
2020 ▼ (-65.5%) 6,458
2021 ▲ (+107.9%) (as at end May) 6,884

MIDDLE EAST
2019 ▲ (+15.1%) 60,003
2020 ▼ (-56.2%) 26,288
2021 ▲ (+27.2%) (as at end May) 17,086

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
2019 (+13.5%) 705,140 ▲ (+13.5%)
2020 ▼ (-79.8%) 142,243
2021 ▼ (-3.1%) (as at end May) 104,822

TOP 10 MARKETS by Nationality

(as at end May 2021)

1.  Russia (23.3%) 105,924 (+265.9%)
2. India (19.7%) 89,424 (+156.5%)
3. Germany (5.5%) 25,129(-11.0%)
4. Ukraine (5.1%) 23,341 (+412.4%)
5. Kazakhstan (3.7%) 16,661 (+501.3%)
6. U.S.A (3.5%) 15,697 (+37.5%)
7. U.K (2.9%) 13,048 (-60.2%)
8. Romania (2.5%) 11,454 (+185.1%)
9. France (2.2%) 10,152 (-53.4%)
10. Czech Republic (2.2%) 9,937 (+127.1%)

TOP 10 ARRIVALS by Country of Residence

(as at end May 2021)

1. **Russia:** 99,895 % of Russian (98.6%)
2. **India:** 80,299 % of Indians (97.5%)
3. **U.A.E: 26,671** % of Emiratis (17.3%)
4. **Germany:** 23,218 % Germans (88.4%)
5. **Ukraine**: 21,332 % of Ukranians (97.5%)
6. **Kazakhstan:** 16,008 % Kazakhs (95.35%)
7. **U.S.A**: 13,345 % of Americans (87.5%)
8. **Switzerland:** 11,588 % Swiss (70.6%)
9. **Romania:** 10,602 % of Romanians (96.4%)
10. **Czech Republic:** 9,040 % Czech (+92.9%)

AIRLINES OPERATING TO THE MALDIVES

(as of May 2021)

SCHEDULED 28

CHARTERED 09

EUROPE

Scheduled

- AEROFLOT
- AIR FRANCE
- AUSTRIAN AIRLINES
- AZUR AIR RUSSIA
- BRITISH AIRWAYS
- CONDOR
- EDELWEISS
- LUFTHANSA
- TURKISH AIRLINES

Chartered

- AIR ASTANA
- AZUR AIR UKRIANE
- GULLIVAIR
- SCAT AIRLINES
- UZBEKISTAN AIRWAYS
- UKRAINE INT'L AIRLINES
- LOT POLISH AIRLINES

MIDDLE EAST

Scheduled

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

OTHERS

Scheduled

- SINGAPORE AIRLINES
- SRILANKAN AIRLINES
- SILK AIR
- AIR SEYCHELLES

INDIA

Scheduled

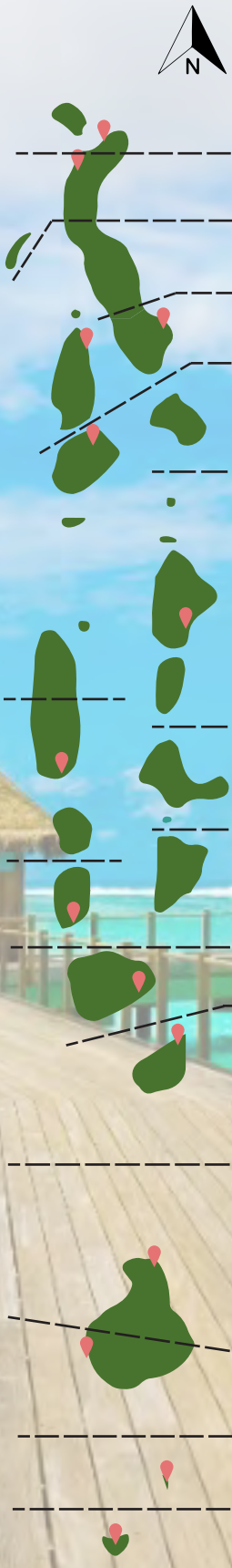
- AIR INDIA
- GOAIR
- INDIGO

Chartered

- AIR VISTARA

TOURIST FACILITIES

(In Operation as at end May 2021)



H.A. ATOLL
2 Resorts 394 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
8 Guesthouses 96 Beds

SH. ATOLL
2 Resorts 457 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
1 Guesthouses 8 Beds

R. ATOLL
12 Resorts 3,088 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
0 Guesthouses 0 Beds

B. ATOLL
16 Resorts 2,953 Beds
1 Hotels 150 Beds
24 Guesthouses 462 Beds

A.A. ATOLL
10 Resorts 2,074 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
92 Guesthouses 1,214Beds

A.DH. ATOLL
16 Resorts 4,200 Beds
1 Hotels 56 Beds
46 Guesthouses 702 Beds

M. ATOLL
2 Resorts 400 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
1 Guesthouse 12 Beds

F. ATOLL
1 Resort 250 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
1 Guesthouses 14 Beds

TH. ATOLL
1 Resort 152 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
1 Guesthouse 12 Beds

G.DH. ATOLL
3 Resorts 550 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
3 Guesthouses 48 Beds

S. ATOLL
1 Resorts 100 Beds
1 Hotels 156 Beds
8 Guesthouses 164 Beds

H.DH. ATOLL
1 Resort 118 Beds
1 Hotels 104 Beds
3 Guesthouses 50 Beds

N. ATOLL
7 Resorts 1,398 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
3 Guesthouses 44 Beds

LH. ATOLL
9 Resorts 2,250 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
2 Guesthouses 28 Beds

K. ATOLL
52 Resorts 12,582 Beds
5 Hotels 758 Beds
179 Guesthouses 4,178 Beds

V. ATOLL
3 Resorts 614 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
35 Guesthouses 418 Beds

DH. ATOLL
8 Resorts 2,782 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
0 Guesthouses 0 Beds

L. ATOLL
2 Resorts 242 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
2 Guesthouses 78 Beds

G.A. ATOLL
6 Resorts 1,036 Beds
1 Hotels 136 Beds
1 Guesthouse 12 Beds

GN. ATOLL
0 Resorts 0 Beds
0 Hotels 0 Beds
15 Guesthouses 186 Beds

Accommodation Facilities

(at end May 2021)

	No.s	Beds
Resorts / Marinas	154	35,640
Hotels	10	1,360
Guesthouses	425	7,726
Safari Vessels	139	2,726
Total	728	**47,452**

If you want to communicate, you're a safe destination you need data

- Sandra Carvão
UNWTO , Chief of Market Intelligence and Competitiveness

Photo by: Milaidhoo Island Maldives

IN CONVERSATION WITH

MOHAMED SOBAH

HOTEL MANAGER

COMO MAALIFUSHI

> *be passionate of what you do, be dedicated and take ownership, be honest, be kind-hearted, be open-minded and relish yourself*

Mohamed Sobah is an enthusiastic leader from Addu City Hithadhoo. He joined COMO Hotels & Resorts as a Front Office Assistant in November 2002 at Cocoa Island. Over the years, he grew and evolved with the company, taking on more responsibilities. Sobah became the Front Office Manager in 2011 and was transferred to COMO Maalifushi in June 2013. He was promoted to Director of Rooms in December 2017. Sobah brings with him 20 years of hospitality experience. He holds a Master Certificate in Hospitality Management from eCornell University and at present pursuing a Master of Business Administration from Maldives Business School. Currently he is Resort Manager and the overall in-charge of COMO Maalifushi since September 2020.

What drew you to the hospitality industry? Tell us about your hospitality journey.

After completing my secondary school in 1999, I was compelled to find a job to support my family even though it was my wish to go for further studies. At that time, there were not many options, hence I was seeking assistance from my friends to find a job in a resort. I was lucky enough to join Paradise Island Resort & Spa as Housekeeping Assistant. Forever, I will be grateful to those friends (especially Shafiu and Nazeef) who supported me with this. After completing a couple of months in Housekeeping, I moved as Outlet Cashier and later I was promoted as Assistant Cashier. In 2002, I completed my first hospitality certificate level course as best overall student in Front Office Operation from the Hotel School.

You have been with the COMO Hotels since 2002. How did your career path lead you to this hotel chain?

The day I did my exam for the certificate level course, Cocoa Island had the open day interview at Nasandhura Palace Hotel. I accompanied a classmate as he was interested to apply. Later, he was not comfortable to go for this interview and I thought I would give it a try. I was so fortunate that I was selected as Front Office Assistant as a pre-opening team member at Cocoa Island. I then stepped up my career path within this property and filled all the positions within Front Office. In 2010, I got the opportunity and did a management training at the COMO London properties which was an eye-opener for me. I was then promoted to Front Office Manager in 2011 before being transferred to COMO Maalifushi as pre-opening Front Office Manager in 2013.

What is your current role at COMO Maalifushi like?

As Hotel Manager, I am responsible for the overall management of the resort to achieve the highest standards and business targets while exceeding customer satisfaction and keeping the team motivated.

What is the most challenging part of your job? How do you keep your team motivated?

Two main responsibilities of this job are, 1. Ensuring that we maintain the level of our service and 2. Ensuring that the team is satisfied with what they have done at the end of the day. As part of the higher management it is a big part of my responsibility to see to it that the team is given the right guidance, is properly trained as well as properly taken care of to guarantee they are confident in the service they provide to our clients. This way, at the end of the day, we will feel satisfied with our achievements.

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

The Maldives is a very special place and tourism industry is the backbone of the country's' economy which plays an important role in earning foreign exchange revenues. The country has positioned itself as a luxury tourist destination from the beginning and the "one island, one resort" concept is the most unique part of the Maldives tourism. Equally, the hospitable employees are the ones who make the difference while offering standout experiences to the visitors. The current plan of diversification of the tourism to other Atolls was a good decision, though to succeed it would require a strategic and strong marketing plan to promote these destinations. In addition, focusing on sustainable eco-friendly tourism and targeting all markets would be a key factor to be effective compared to other competitive destinations.

We will be celebrating the golden Jubilee year of Maldives Tourism in 2022. What are your expectations for the golden year?

I would like to see a recognition program being implemented by the government with the support of the industry stakeholders to appreciate our most valuable asset in the hospitality industry – the employees. In addition, I would wish to see a nationwide hospitality training strategy being executed to train the youth and our future leaders to overcome the current shortage of local talents.

In your opinion what should the Maldives focus on as a destination to maintain its image and reputation in the global travel industry?

In my view, focusing on eco-friendly, sustainable tourism and professional employees are the key to continue to be a competitive destination. I also feel it is time to halt awarding new islands for development and focus on completing the current awarded islands to maintain the effectiveness of those resort islands which are in operation or yet to be opened.

What are your major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this industry?

The industry is very much in need to complete the development of our main gateway 'Velana International Airport' as well as to focus on other international airports in the north and south of Maldives to diversify the tourism to those areas. I would also wish to see better transportation options within the country while considering lower airfare to develop the guest house business in local islands.

Photo by: COMO Hotels / COMO Maalifushi

We are in a global pandemic situation for over a year now. What are your biggest concerns or challenges for your business as a result of the Covid-19 crisis? How are you adapting to the new normal travel patterns?

The biggest concern is the country's current situation and I hope this will improve rather sooner than later. If it continues, we may have to suffer in the coming months as especially with the vaccination many competitor destinations will have the advantage over us. As a business organization we are taking all measures recommended by the healthcare professions and are following the set regulations by the government to compete in the market. This also results in business continuity while retaining the employees instead of furlough or having the same situation as last year when we closed our borders.

Have you had cost saving strategies during Covid-19, what would have been your winning strategies?

My colleagues and I have reviewed all our spending expenses and the strategy is to spend what is needed while maintaining our highest standards.

Are there any expectations you had about this industry which you found differed from reality, in both a good or bad way?

In my opinion the tourism industry is not getting as much attention by the policy makers and law enforcement authorities. It is also the sad reality that there are many young adults in the country who are looking for a job and yet we are in need of training those youths to occupy some of the tourism sector jobs. In addition, I also feel the female involvement in the industry is very much needed as currently it is dominated by the male gender. I believe fixing these will help to boost our countries delicate economy.

What skills are most crucial to succeed in this industry?

To be passionate of what you do, be dedicated and take ownership, be honest, be kind-hearted, be open-minded and relish yourself.

What's the biggest factor that has helped you to be successful?

I always see any challenge as an opportunity to be successful. I have always maintained my discipline, motivation and dedication, work ethics and loved my job.

Who are the people behind your success? Who encourages and supports you the most? Who do you look up to for inspiration or mentorship?

I have worked with many inspirational leaders and mentors whose guidance and support I will always appreciate. Without a doubt, it is also my warmhearted colleagues, thoughtful friends, caring managers, loving family and especially my wife who supported me to achieve to be where I am today.

> *if you are looking for a job in the hospitality industry, please take any opportunity which may come your way and I am sure you will be able to achieve your dream job with your dedication and commitment.*

How can employers ensure that younger professionals are attracted to the hotel industry?

I would say most of the employers are doing their maximum to attract younger professionals to the hotel industry. I also believe it is the equal responsibility of the responsible authorities to prepare young adults for this industry and assure those local talents are being considered for the job openings in the hotel industry. In my view, most of our younger professionals wish to be hired for administrative or frontline professions as opposed to other available vacancies in areas like culinary, finance, engineering, etc... This would need to be a strategic plan at policy level to develop younger professionals to takeover these traditionally not sought after professions.

What advice would you offer to those locals who are inspired to become successful in the hotel industry?

My advice is that if you are looking for a job in the hospitality industry, please take any opportunity which may come your way and I am sure you will be able to achieve your dream job with your dedication and commitment. Also never lose hope and work hard with positivity while being passionate about your job.

What are your next career steps?

To be a successful leader in the hospitality industry and to become General Manager. Furthermore, to contribute my knowledge and expertise to the country's younger professionals who wish to develop their career path in this hospitable sector.

WOMEN IN TOURISM

SHALINEE AHMED

GENERAL MANAGER SALES & MARKETING

UNIVERSAL RESORTS

Do not let anything other than your hard work, continual learning, adaptation to changes and perseverance define you

Shalinee Ahmed has been working at the Universal Resorts for the past 20 years. She joined Universal Resorts as a Contracting Executive and is currently leading the Marketing Department of the group as the General Manager for Sales and Marketing. With the company's full support, she completed her Undergraduate Degree in Operations Management and her Master's Degree in Marketing Management. She also sits on the board of Universal Foundation since 2013, which according to her is the most rewarding aspect of her role within the group.

She is an inspiring leader, a dedicated wife, a mother of two wonderful girls and has a large close-knit family behind her to support and love.

Was hospitality your first career choice? What motivated you to join this industry?

To be honest, when I left school, I was not sure of my career choice. I believe my luck or fate has led me to this industry. Even though I was unsure about the way forward, I was certain from the very beginning that I needed to learn more and I wanted to develop myself. I wanted an opportunity for myself and I saw Universal Resorts as a perfect fit, as they were known for developing people in this industry.

Where and when did you start your hospitality career from? What lead you to Universal Resorts?

After my secondary school education, I started working for a communications company in the Maldives, but at the same time, I continued looking for better opportunities. At that time, I thought that the best opportunities for work and more importantly for personal growth were available in the hospitality industry. I wanted to join a company where I can excel. I was actively looking for a position in a company that was known for developing people, when I found an entry position in Universal Resorts as a Contracting Executive .

Universal Resorts being one of the oldest and largest local hotel chains in the Maldives, how challenging is your role as the General Manager of Sales and Marketing of the hotel chain?

There are many perks working for a hotel chain that is the pioneer of the Tourism Industry in the Maldives. During challenging times, you have the added advantages such as a wide wealth of experiences and expertise to tackle anything that comes up.

You have been in the hospitality industry for over 20 years. How would you describe your journey so far?

The way we work right now is very different compared to how it was when I first started. Back then, we used to have more demand than supply, and it is the other way round now. This Industry has made amazing transformations from the variety of products on offer, how we work and how our guests book as well. Technology has definitely left its mark in this industry and it is here to stay. We have been, and are continuously adapting and learning along the way as technology changes, not just this industry but the whole world.

What is an average work week like for you? How do you balance work and life responsibilities?

I try to balance work and family as much as possible. Most of my weekdays are dedicated to work and evenings with the family. All weekends are very much family time.

Hospitality industry is perceived as a male dominated industry specially in leadership roles. What is the biggest factor that has helped you to be successful?
I believe male or female, hardwork, constant learning, perseverance and compassion are the key to anyone's success.

In your opinion what is the most significant barrier for female employees, specially locals in this industry?

There are many factors contributing to this. I would say the community's perception of female employees working in this industry is one, however there is more acceptance within the community now compared to before.

Also, the expectation from the community of a woman's role at home is a limiting factor for female employees to work in this industry, especially when they have to work at a resort site.

In my opinion female employees who come with a family or children are still not as widely accepted as their male counterparts – this is something that needs to change. There is misperception on what a woman with a family can deliver when compared to a man. I believe there should be equal opportunities for both men and women based on their deliverables for the job. This is in all Industries and not specific to Tourism or Hospitality Industry.

What policies should we put in place to make it more attractive and welcoming for female leaders?

*I*n short, to have mostly the same policies (written and unwritten) for both genders is important for me from equal pay, to equal opportunities for promotions, growth and development.

What is your view on Maldives tourism? What has been the most meaningful change since you joined the industry?

The tourism industry has seen noticeable changes in recent years. The dynamics has changed with the technological developments empowering customers whilst influencing traveler decisions all via technology.

I would also like to highlight on the growing interest and awareness in the environmental and social and economic impact of one's own travel which is becoming to be one of the deciding factors when choosing a destination or a specific product.

What would be your advice to the young women entering this industry aspiring to be in leadership roles?

Do not let anything other than your hard work, continual learning, adaptation to changes and perseverance define you.

Who do you look up to for inspiration and mentorship?

I do have a lot of inspirational figures and mentors that I admire specially in my current work place and also within the industry. It would be wrong for me to just name one.

It will also be unfair if I do not mention my family. Especially my mother, father, husband and children. They are my biggest supporters.

> *"There is misperception on what a woman with a family can deliver when compared to a man. I believe there should be equal opportunities for both men and women based on their deliverables for the job*
>
> *- Shalinee Ahmed*

Photo by: Universal Resorts / Dhigali Maldives

RISING STAR

AHMED AYAAN (YAAN)

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS COORDINATOR

WALDORF ASTORIA MALDIVES ITHAAFUSHI

"Tourism is a very broad industry with lots of opportunities. No matter where your strengths lie or what your passions are, you will be able to find a position that suits your own unique talent"

Ahmed Ayaan (Yaan) was born and bred in A.Dh. Dhangethi. After completing middle school, he migrated to Male' for higher studies. Completed Secondary school studies from EPS School, did O'Level and began his hospitality career in 2004. He joined Hilton Group in 2008 from Conrad Maldives Rangali Island. Ayaan was transferred to another luxury brand within Hilton, the Waldorf Astoria Maldives in 2019 as a House Keeping Coordinator and is currently the Employee Relations Coordinator at the Resort.

Yaan is known to many as a friendly person and who gets along with people easily. He is a go-to-person for many of the team members, both locals and expats. He is a champion of many activities in the resort and has always been an ambassador of the resort locals' community. He is a reflection of true Maldivian.

When did you first join the tourism industry?

I began my journey in the Hospitality industry back in 2004 as a receptionist in Chaya Lagoon Hakurahura right after leaving school. In 2007, I received the champion of Front Office from Wizard of Cinnamon & Chaya hotels (Maldives)

In 2008, I was presented with the opportunity to join one of the world's leading hospitality brands, Hilton Worldwide when I joined Conrad Maldives Rangali Island as a Receptionist. During my time there I was privileged to work in various sections of front office. After a span of over five years in Front office, I moved to the recreation department which I thoroughly enjoyed working in.

Were you interested in this industry before?

Yes, I was very interested and passionate about joining the industry as I got several chances to visit some resorts during my school days and have heard from my friends about resort life. Ever since then I had a strong desire to work in the hospitality industry.

How did you get to the position of Employee Relations Coordinator of Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi?

After working for over ten amazing years at Conrad Maldives, I transferred to the iconic Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi as Housekeeping Coordinator and after a period of nine months I joined the Human Resources team as the Employee Relations coordinator which is my current role.

I have always been into sports and other extra-curricular activities. As a social personal I wanted to work in different aspects of a resort, often looking for opportunities in order to progress and gain experience in different fields. Furthering my inter-personal skills and love for organizing sporting and social events is why I decided to apply for and get the role of Employee Relations Coordinator in Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi.

How do you manage your daily tasks? What is the favorite part of your job?

For us (HR), our team members are our customers and they are our greatest assets. As an Employee Relations coordinator, I work very closely with our team members. Making a list of the things to do and to follow up on a daily basis. Sometimes when

things don't go according to plan, segregating tasks in accordance to 'Important and urgent', 'Important but not urgent', 'Urgent but not important' and 'Urgent and important'.

While I execute these tasks, my overarching theme is to be patient, flexible and most importantly clear communication.

There are a number of favorite aspects of what I do. Such as organizing all the events and activities for the team members which is a task that I enjoy a lot. Working together with as a team and successfully completing tasks resulting in seeing the happiness in our fellow team member's eyes is a very gratifying experience.

What are the challenges in employee relations post covid-19?

The covid-19 pandemic brought on lots of challenges in recruiting suitable candidates for vacant roles. Sometimes we find a good candidate but are unable to bring them due to travel restrictions or family issues. It often happens when we approach candidates for full time jobs where some are willing to join only for a short period of time.

These challenges usually lead to an increase of flexible working schedules and "work from home" job roles especially in the admin sector. Which is great as this would not limit recruiters when hiring, thus bringing unemployment rates lower during these trying times when the industry is on a path to recovery.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

I am most proud about the successful events we have held for our team members such as the Team Member

Photo by: Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi

Annual party. The team was very excited and eagerly anticipating the party but we had to postponed it at very last moment due to the rise of positive cases in Male city, and our stage, sound & lighting technicians, musicians were not able to travel. But with lots of hard work and dedication, we were able to have a successful party in the end on a later date. When any of the events are successfully completed, it is certainly a big achievement, especially during these trying times.

In addition to this, working in and experiencing multiple departments / sections of this industry is something I consider to be one of my great accomplishments as it resulted in the acquisition of multiple skills for me.

As an enthusiastic young professional, how would you describe the tourism industry of the Maldives?

Tourism is the largest contributor for the economy of our country and one of the largest employing sectors, the industry is constantly developing at a rapid pace. In 2020, Maldives was the World's leading travel destination and every year our resorts are achieving top awards on an international scale, showing that our industry is the leading industry in the country and globally. Definitely an exciting time to be in hospitality, in the Maldives!

Are you enjoying resort life? What do you miss most?

I think fifteen years in the Hospitality (tourism) industry and over thirteen of those years with Hilton Worldwide alone shows how much I enjoy my resort life. Though I enjoy resort life, I do really miss my family and the gatherings, tasty food made with love by my mom. As a scout I also enjoy participating in jamborees & camping and I volunteer for many big events held by NGOs.

Other than hospitality what are your interests as a profession?

Since my childhood, I have always loved to volunteer and be a part of community / social work. During my school time back in 2000, I joined the world's largest youth movement Scouting and in 2010, completed a Scout leader course and since then I have been working as a scout leader. In 2012, I joined Maldivian Red Crescent as a volunteer and became a part of the Emergency Response Team (ERT).

As a hobby, I dive (Certified Rescue Diver) and get involved in Boduberu. As an avid lover of nature, I enjoy gardening and having aquariums.

What would you tell young locals entering the tourism industry?

Tourism is a very broad industry with lots of opportunities. No matter where your strengths lie or what your passions are, you will be able to find a position that suits your own unique talent.

Sometimes you just need to grab the opportunity and join the industry, even if isn't your dream job. Dedication, hard work and patience will lead you to your dream job eventually.

What are your future goals?

There are still some sectors that I would like to experience in the hospitality industry. What I believe is that success is not only achieving a high post or position. Learning and experiencing different areas is also a form of success. Learning more about this beautiful industry developing my skills is one of my key future goals.

ARTIST PROFILE

FAZEEL KHALEEL

MUSICIAN

Fazeel Khaleel is a multi-talented local artist who has been working in the resort music industry for over 20 years. Coming from a family with a long history of music, he developed an interest and passion in music since childhood. He is a music composer, a vocalist and a multi-instrumentalist with saxophone and piano as his specialties. While he continues his family legacy, he has two daughters who are following the family tradition, aspiring to be future artists themselves.

He began his music profession in the year 1994 as a tenor saxophonist in the Maldives Military Band and as a keyboard player for the Maldives Military Pop Band. In the early 2000, he became a member of the famous "Sultans" band in the Maldives. The band, was in high demand for gigs during that time and performed in number of resorts. They also performed at several music festivals organized by the government and official local Island events. The Band's album "Beynumey", was a huge hit in the Maldives.

Fazeel later took an interest in soft music and solo performances. In 2006 he joined a soft music band and started doing solo performances. Since then, he has been performing as a solo artist whilst playing duo gigs and occasionally with major bands for mega events. His career reached its peak after he took an interest in performing solo. He continues to perform as a solo artist.

Moreover, Fazeel is the Composer and Engineer of Tonic Live Studio, a famous music & recording studio in the Maldives. He is a sessionist, saxophonist, keyboard and vocalist for recordings conducted at the studio. With hard work and dedication for his profession, he has earned a reputation of being a reliable and respected artist in the resort music industry over the years.

Regenerative tourism is a raising of our ambition. It is the goal of restoring ecosystems, and along with it generating economic development and improving livelihoods for the long term

– Mr. John Pagano
Chief Executive Officer of The Red Sea Development Company and AMAALA

Photo by: Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi

Highlights from Visit Maldives

By: Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation

"I'm Vaccinated" Campaign Launched

Visit Maldives together with the Ministry of Tourism launches "I'm Vaccinated" campaign in order to share a positive message regarding the vaccination of staff working in the tourism sector as well as promoting the initiatives undertaken to ensure the Maldives remains one of the safest destinations in the world for travelers.

Under this campaign, the ultimate target is to make Maldives the first fully vaccinated tourism sector in the world. Along with the unique geographical formation of the islands which offer natural physical distancing, and the stringent health and safety measures in place, a fully vaccinated tourism sector will become an added advantage in encouraging tourists to visit the destination.

The campaign was launched during a special press event held on 28th April 2021 organized by Visit Maldives and the Ministry of Tourism. The event was joined by the Minister of Tourism, Minister of State of the Ministry of Health, Secretary General of Guesthouse Association of Maldives and Vice Chairman of Maldives Association of Tourism Industry.

The event commenced with opening remarks by the Minister of Tourism Honorable Dr. Abdulla Mausoom. The Minister remarked upon the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry during 2020 and emphasized the immense sacrifice, effort and hardwork invested by the health industry, tourism industry, and all members of the Maldivian society. In addition, the Minister stated that being able to provide vaccination to members in the tourism industry was a huge accomplishment. The Minister officially initiated the 'I'm Vaccinated' campaign followed by a short video showcasing the 'I'm Vaccinated' logo.

Speaking at the ceremony, Minister of State of the Ministry of Health, Dr. Shah Abdulla Mahir stated that over 65% of the eligible Maldivian population have received the vaccine and over 90% of the eligible tourism industry is vaccinated. The Minister of State of the Ministry of Health placed importance on practicing health and safety measures regardless of the vaccination and placed emphasis on the importance of achieving herd immunity. He thanked MMPRC and the Ministry of Tourism for launching the 'I'm Vaccinated' campaign as the campaign will promote the vaccination drive and motivate facilities in the tourism industry to vaccinate their staff.

Afterwards, MMPRC presented the esteemed delegation with a special 'I'm Vaccinated' badge. The badge will be presented to members of the tourism industry who have received the prescribed dose(s) of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Following the launch of the program, The Managing Director of Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), Mr. Thoyyib Mohamed stated that the purpose of the 'I'm Vaccination' campaign is to promote vaccination for all members in the tourism industry and for Maldives to have the first fully-vaccinated tourism industry in the world. The Managing DIrector of MMPRC also unveiled a microsite that will be launched under the 'I'm Vaccinated' Campaign and social media activities that will be initiated alongside. .

The microsite will display a counter displaying the number of tourist industry staff vaccination as well as information regarding registration for vaccination of employees and the latest HPA guidelines. Furthermore, the social media campaign component of the campaign will present images and videos of workers in the tourism industry with a pinned vaccination badge that will be presented to them by Visit Maldives once they receive the prescribed dose(s) of the COVID-19 vaccination. The social media campaign will further help advertise Maldives as a 'safe haven' destination across the globe.

Speaking at the conference, Secretary General of Guesthouse Association of Maldives, Saudhulla Ahmed Hassan Didi noted on the impact of COVID-19 on the guesthouse industry and island communities while Vice Chairman of Maldives Association of Tourism Industry, Mr. Salah Shihab recognized the sacrifice undertaken by members of the tourism industry as they had to stay apart from families during the pandemic, stating that the 'I'm Vaccinated' campaign gives hope to workers across the industry.

The campaign will uplift the destination's beautiful name in the global market and reassure travelers that Maldives will further remain as one of the safest destinations to travel to during this unprecedented time. In addition, the campaign will also ensure travelers from all over the world of the immense effort and investment into ensuring the safety of both the local population and travelers.

On 1st February 2021, Maldives initiated the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine, and the government aims to provide free COVID-19 vaccine to all citizens and residents of Maldives in the upcoming months. The initiation of the vaccination drive is bound to offer hope to the local population, as well as ensure the safety of tourists. This conveys the message that Maldives is a low-risk destination for travelers and will hopefully generate a surge in tourist arrival.

Maldives showcased at the Arabian Travel Market

Maldives is being showcased at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) which is the market leading international travel and tourism event for the Middle Eastern market. Together with Visit Maldives, 69 partners representing 37 tourism establishments from across the various sectors of Maldives Tourism industry are showcased under the Maldives.

The Maldives is represented by an attractive stand displaying the tourism products and unique experiences in a 420 Sqm stand designed specially to represent the beauty and wonders of Maldives through colourful imagery, videography and state of the art 360 degree touchless experiences for the visitors. Furthermore, business meetings are being conducted at the designated B2B area of the Stand while information about the destination is given over the reception counters. Visit Maldives also participated at media interviews and panel discussions at the global stage during ATM.
In line with the Visit Maldives' health and safety guidelines for in-person events to ensure health and safety of everyone and the ATM's newn density rules, the Maldives stand is configured to accommodate restricted numbers of visitors at one given time as well as regularly sanitised surfaces.

This year's ATM is run as a hybrid event with the live event taking place at the Dubai World Trade Centre from 16-19 May 2021 and a virtual event including webinars and 1-2-1 video meetings taking place a week later, from 24-26 May 2021. This is also the first major in person event for the Arabian Market presenting the opportunity for the global travel trade to meet, network, negotiate and conduct business through a series of on-stand meetings, interactive displays, seminars, panel discussions, networking sessions and more. During the 4 day event, participants will have an opportunity to showcase their products, network with various key industry stakeholders, generate new business leads as well as engage in B2B sessions.

The Middle Eastern market has historically been an important source market for Maldives. Since the reopening of the borders, the Middle East remains to be a key focus market. Under the key strategy of maintaining brand visibility to ensure Maldives as a top of the mind destination, continuous marketing activities are conducted targeting the Middle Eastern Market. Coinciding with ATM, Visit Maldives will host a press conference and roadshow in Dubai on 17th May. As for completed and ongoing events targeting the Middle Eastern market, Visit Maldives recently conducted a media familiarization trip and has two ongoing marketing campaigns for the Middle Eastern region with Wego and Sky News Arabia.

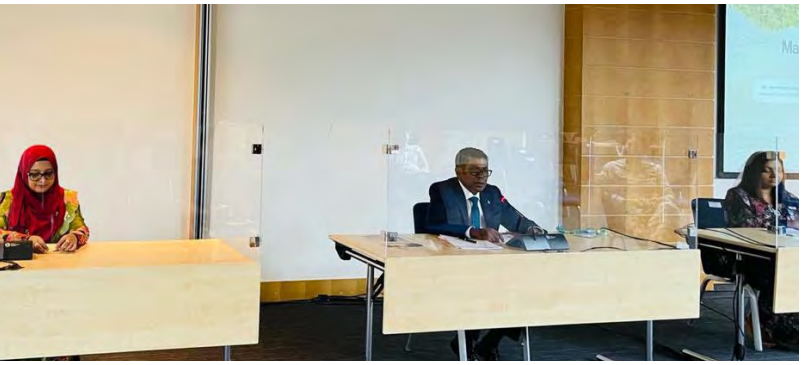
In 2020, 26,288 tourists visited Maldives from the Middle East with core markets from the region being among the leading source countries to the Maldives in terms of arrivals post the lockdown period. As a result of mass vaccination drives, easing of travel restrictions and direct flight connectivity, the goal of reaching pre-pandemic arrival numbers from the Middle East shows consistent potential. As of 12th May , Maldives has welcomed a total of 418,579 visitors and among that 7,729 arrivals were recorded from the Middle East market.

Maldives reopened its borders for tourists of all nationalities on 15th July 2020, with rigorous procedures in place to ensure the safety of tourists and tourism workers. Tourists are required to fill an online health declaration form within 24 hours prior to their departure, as well as have a negative PCR test result, conducted 96 hours prior to their departure.

The administration of the Covid-19 vaccine was initiated on 1st February 2021 with the government of Maldives set to provide free COVID-19 vaccines to all citizens and residents of the country in the upcoming months.

Visit Maldives together with the Ministry of Tourism launches "I'm Vaccinated" campaign in order to share a positive message regarding the vaccination of staff working in the tourism sector as well as promoting the initiatives undertaken to ensure the Maldives remains one of the safest destinations in the world for travelers. The ultimate target is to make Maldives the destination with the first fully vaccinated tourism sector in the world.

Visit Maldives hosts important events on the sidelines of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM)



Visit Maldives hosts several events on the sidelines of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) on 17th May 2021. The two events "The Maldives Media Meet" and "Connect with Maldives, your safe haven" were hosted for the Middle Eastern Media and the Travel Trade respectively.

'Maldives: Media Meet" press event was attended by key travel trade media of the UAE and Middle Eastern region. Speakers at the event were Mr. Thoyyib Mohamed, Managing Director of Visit Maldives, H.E. Ms. Aminath Shabeena, Ambassador of the Republic of the Maldives to UAE, and Ms. Fathimath Afra, Deputy Chief Marketing Officer of Visit Maldives.

During the Maldives Media Meet, key updates from the Maldives were shared. Mr. Thoyyib Mohamed addressed on the topics of how Maldives is tackling the pandemic and strategic opening of borders for the revival of tourism, updates of health and safety measures, "I'm Vaccinated" campaign to vaccinate all tourism industry employees, as well as the future initiatives such as the celebration of 50 years of Tourism in the Maldives were related.

H. E. Aminath Shabeena talked on the angle of foreign policy and updated on the ongoing discussion between the two governments on establishing a travel corridor which is anticipated to happen in the near future.
Marketing challenges and recovery strategies during the pandemic, plans for the Middle Eastern and GCC markets were revealed by Ms. Fathimath Afra. Furthermore, plans for important activities in the pipeline such as the World Expo 2020 to be held in Dubai in October and the Explore Maldives Live, to bring Maldives experiences on livestream for the Middle Eastern Market on the My Virtual Maldives Platform were highlighted.

Event ended with a question and answer session in which there was a lot of interest shown by the journalists towards the destination and answers were given to queries on the travel information and travel corridor between UAE and the Maldives.

The press conference was followed by a roadshow titled 'Connect with Maldives; Your Safe Haven.' The one-day roadshow targeting Dubai based Travel Agents and Tour Operators created the opportunity for Maldives tourism industry partners to connect with over 50 key travel trade partners from the Middle Eastern market.

10 Maldives tourism industry partners representing resorts and DMCs participated at the event. The participants had the opportunity to showcase their properties, products and highlight the unique experiences available at each of the respective properties as well as generate new business leads and engage in one-on-one networking opportunities.

Visit Maldives related information about the destination and the four products; resorts, guest houses, liveaboards and hotels. Furthermore, information was given out during the speed networking session on the latest information for travel to the Maldives and why the Maldives remains a safe destination for travel at this time due to its geographic formation of isolated islands, the one island one resort concept and the stringent health and safety measures in place.

During the evening, popular travel blogger and influencer from the Middle East, Ms. Sana Chikhalia shared her experiences of holidaying in the Maldives and talked about the beauty of the destination.

Attendees had the opportunity to take part in a raffle and win a free holiday at Sun Siyam Olhuveli resort.

In addition, the much anticipated 'Tales of Maldives' campaign was launched by the Managing Director of VIsit Maldives Mr. Thoyyib Mohamed. The Tales of Maldives is part of the Story of Maldives Campaign which is an integrated marketing campaign to help kickstart a journey towards achieving a powerful brand resonance and identity. The aim of the campaign is to present creative, engaging and memorable content that will leave a long lasting footprint of the Maldives on the travellers' minds, ultimately helping create a deep rooted emotional connection and love for the Maldives, culture, folklore, natural assets and experiences.

These were the first in-person events held in the market since the onset of the pandemic. During each of these events, Mr. Thoyyib Mohamed thanked the media and travel trade respectively for the support they have shown to the Maldives during the most challenging times.

In line with the objective to maintain brand visibility and engage travel trade, these events will bring a positive impact to the UAE market and other markets in the GCC region as travel restrictions ease. These activities are conducted by Visit Maldives as part of the recovery action plan for the Middle Eastern market.

Visit Maldives Takes part in FITUR 2021

Maldives is showcased at FITUR 2021, the leading international travel and tourism market held in Spain. During the event held from 19th - 23rd May 2021, Visit Maldives aims to create destination awareness and increase the arrival numbers to Maldives. 5 industry tourism establishments will take part in the event alongside Visit Maldives.

Maldives is represented at an attractive 72 sqm stand designed specially to represent the beauty and wonder of Maldives through colorful imagery and videos. The unique geographical formation of Maldives and the safety provided by the scattered islands of Maldives will be emphasized and highlighted at the stand through eye-catching promotional videos on an LED TV screen. In addition, a quiz regarding details on Maldives will be held at the stand to entice travelers and winners will receive a goodie bag.

In line with the Visit Maldives' health and safety guidelines for in-person events to ensure health and safety of everyone, the Maldives stand is configured to accommodate restricted numbers of visitors at one given time as well as regularly sanitised surfaces.

The 5-day event welcomes both trade visitors and professionals from the tourism industry as well as the general public who come for first-hand information about the destination. The trade fair is open exclusively to trade visitors on the first three days and the general public is invited for the weekend. During 2020, FITUR surpassed the previously held record with an audience of 11,040 companies representing 165 countries, 150,011 trade visitors, 111,809 visitors from the general public as well as over 5,300 media representatives.

FITUR presents the opportunity for the global travel trade to meet, network, maintain old business relationships and build new ones. The participants alongside Visit Maldives will have the opportunity to present their latest products and experiences as well as taking part in one-on-one meetings, seminars, networking sessions and more.

As of March 2021, Maldives has welcomed over 3,400 travelers from the Spanish market ranking the market as the 18th top market to Maldives. With the mass vaccination drives and easing of travel restrictions, it is hopeful that the arrival figure from Spain will increase within the next few months. As of 15th May 2021, the Maldives has welcomed a total of 428,400 travelers.

Furthermore, Visit Maldives is currently conducting a digital campaign with Passporter APP, a leading travel application in the Spain market to create awareness of the destination and to reach a large audience through influencers with large followerbases. Other activities in the pipeline include media and media fam trips and roadshows to target the Spanish market.

Maldives reopened its borders for tourists of all nationalities on 15th July 2020, with rigorous procedures in place to ensure the safety of tourists and tourism workers. Tourists are required to fill an online health declaration form within 24 hours prior to their departure, as well as have a negative PCR test result, conducted 96 hours prior to their departure.In order to strengthen the measures, the administration of the Covid-19 vaccine was initiated on 1st February 2021 with the government of Maldives set to provide free COVID-19 vaccines to all citizens and residents of the country in the upcoming months.

Visit Maldives together with the Ministry of Tourism launches "I'm Vaccinated" campaign in order to share a positive message regarding the vaccination of staff working in the tourism sector as well as promoting the initiatives undertaken to ensure the Maldives remains one of the safest destinations in the world for travelers. The ultimate target is to make Maldives the destination with the first fully vaccinated tourism sector in the world.

Visit Maldives takes part in BIT Virtual Edition 2021

Visit Maldives has taken part in BIT Digital Edition 2021 from 09th to 14th May 2021. Organized by Fiera Milano, the event is held virtually for the first time ever this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

From 09th-11th May, the virtual fair presents the opportunity to network with stakeholders from the Italian market and all over the world, manage appointments on the platform with participants, as well as establish new business connections through B2B meetings. From 12th-14th May, it is open for travelers and B2C components. In addition to this, the event provides a platform to maintain and strengthen destination presence and promote the Maldives as a safe destination to travel to during this challenging period. A total of six companies and 07 participants are taking part in this event, alongside the destination.

Prior to the pandemic, Italy was one of the top markets to the Maldives, with an arrival figure of 136,343 in 2019. Compared to the figures of the previous year this was a 29.5 percent increase. While these figures declined in 2020 due to travel restrictions enforced by the Italian government to contain the spread of COVID-19, it is expected that once these measures are eased and travel resumes, the market will once again be a key contributor to arrival figures.

Several activities are in the pipeline to further promote Maldives in the Italian market. These include B2B and B2C activities such as webinars, digital advertisements, joint campaigns with airlines and tour operators. Additionally, campaigns to provide destination training and latest updates to various media are underway.

Visit Maldives aims to re-establish ourselves as a close to heart destination for Italians and have several activities in the pipeline for the market. This includes personalized social media campaigns in Italian. Additionally, ambient campaigns to increase our brand presence in all major cities and advertising on magazines and TV shows will be carried out specific to diving, safari segments and luxury tourism. Another key target is to achieve growth in the guesthouse segment by creating greater awareness on affordable holiday options, through various platforms. Despite the global pandemic, Maldives has welcomed a total of 555,494 travelers in 2020 and over 190,000 travelers till February 2021.

The administration of the COVID-19 vaccine was initiated on 1st February 2021 with the government of Maldives set to provide free COVID-19 vaccines to all citizens and residents of the country in the upcoming months. As of 03rd May 2021, 298,396 people in the Maldives have received the first dose of the vaccine with 114,240 people receiving the second dose. Over 90% of the workers in the tourism industry of the Maldives have also been administered the first dose of the vaccine. In line with this target, the "I'm Vaccinated" campaign was kicked off on 28th April 2021.These efforts reflect the aim to make Maldives the first fully vaccinated tourism destination in the world.

Visit Maldives Launches Campaign with “Have Halal, Will Travel”

Visit Maldives initiates a digital campaign with Have Halal, Will Travel (HHWT) to maintain destination presence and promote Maldives as a safe haven in the Southeast Asian Market. The campaign that started on 21st May 2021 aims to promote the destination to families and budget-conscious travelers through showcasing the unique experiences and diversity of tourism products the islands destination offers as well as promoting the destination as a perfect getaway for Muslim travellers.

With a monthly reach of over 9.4 million, Have Halal, Will Travel is one of the leading travel and lifestyle platform for Muslim travellers in Asia. The platform has a large audience of engaged travelers with over 572,000 travelers and 274,000 travelers in Malaysia and Singapore respectively, It is a trusted brand among the Southeast Asian travel community that understands and caters to target audience needs. Throughout the campaign, Maldives will be promoted as a destination that caters well to muslims travelers highlighting the religious aspects and halal friendly services and amenities such as availability of halal food and easy accessibility to prayer mosques in all areas of the country.

In this campaign, destination contents will be promoted in in English and Bahasa Indonesia language on the Have Halal, Will Travel platform highlighting useful tips for travel during and post Covid-19 pandemic with variety of recreational activities families, couples and solo travelers can enjoy either on a highly luxurious fashion or even on a budget. In addition, a video showcasing the natural beauty of the island destination, unique experiences and different tourism products and services offered in the Maldives will be shared on their website. All contents published on the Have Halal, Will Travel platform will be further optimized and promoted on their social media handles, Facebook and Instagram to widen the reach.

The campaign is carried out aligned with Visit Maldives’ aim of creating greater appeal to muslims travelers and strengthening the Maldives brand in the Southeast asian region by showcasing the destination as a unique holiday destination that caters for everyone in all walks of life.

Over the years, Maldives has seen a steady growth in terms of tourist arrivals from the Southeast asian region making it a promising market with great flight connectivity to the Maldives. In 2019 Maldives welcomed over 87,636 tourists, from the region to the island destination. Despite travel restrictions, Visit Maldives is promoting the destination in the Southeast Asian market to ensure that Maldives remains as a top of the mind destination among travelers and to ensure that Maldives is the most preferred destination for Southeast Asian travelers once borders reopen for leisure travel and travel restrictions are lifted.

Visit Maldives has recently concluded digital campaigns and participated in virtual fairs to promote Maldives in the Southeast Asia region. Further, several other activities are in the pipeline for the Southeast Asian market such as familiarization trips, trade fairs, joint promotions with tour operators, as well as outdoor ambient campaigns.

The administration of the COVID-19 vaccine was initiated on 1st February 2021 with the government of Maldives set to provide free COVID-19 vaccines to all citizens and residents of the country in the upcoming months. Additionally, the Ministry of Tourism has taken initiative in providing vaccines to all employees working in the tourism sector. To further support the vaccination drive Visit Maldives together with the Ministry of Tourism launched "I'm Vaccinated" campaign in order to share a positive message regarding the vaccination of staff working in the tourism sector as well as promoting the initiatives undertaken to ensure the Maldives remains one of the safest destinations in the world for travelers. The ultimate target is to make Maldives the destination with the first fully vaccinated tourism sector in the world.

Visit Maldives Hosts Joint Webinar with Expedia

Visit Maldives hosts a joint webinar with Expedia for the Travel Agent Affiliate Program (TAAP) targeting the United States (US) market. The B2B (business-to-business) webinar provides the latest destination updates, information on products and experiences, and promotes Maldives as a 'safe haven' for the travelers. The ultimate objective is to deliver the latest destination information to the travel trade and to maintain the momentum of arrivals from the US market and achieve pre-pandemic arrival figures.

TAAP (Travel Agent Affiliate Program) is a program launched by Expedia through which agents in the United States can access Expedia's global inventory and earn commissions on hotels, dynamic packages and activities.

The 45-minute webinar session educates the agents on Maldives as a popular and safe tourist destination to ensure that the agents can promote the correct strategy and messaging for their clients. Over 390 agents registered for this event.

The presentation will focus on individual products and experiences of Maldives with a focus on the unique geography of the destination and the safety provided by the natural socially-distanced scattered islands and the one-island-one-resort concept. The presentation will also showcase experiences unique to the destination such as underwater spas and restaurants.

In addition, information regarding the COVID-19 situation in Maldives, entry requirements as well as the latest travel guidelines will be presented during the webinar. It will be highlighted that Maldives achieved 'Safe Travel Stamp' in 2020 from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and Velana International Airport health accreditation as a recognition of the stringent measures in place.

Details on local initiatives such as the Maldives Border Miles program was briefly discussed in the webinar as well as the latest 'I'm Vaccinated' campaign initiated by the Ministry of Tourism and Visit Maldives. Further details will be shared on the vaccination drive in Maldives such as the objective to make Maldives the destination with the first fully vaccinated tourism industry, vaccinated figures, and future plans.

The webinar was concluded with a Q&A session where participants voiced various queries. These included questions regarding the 'I'm Vaccinated' campaign, PCR testing, entry requirements for vaccinated tourists, and vaccination status of resort staff. This initiative serves to increase the destination knowledge of attendees which, along with the increased connectivity, will drive more tourists from the market to Maldives.

As of 12 May 2021, the United States is ranked as the 6th top source market in the Maldives with an arrival figure of 13,446 and a market share of 3.6%. While there is a decrease due to the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, the market holds great potential for the Maldives and plays an instrumental role in achieving pre-pandemic arrival figures.

As the United States is one of the target markets for Maldives, Visit Maldives is constantly conducting marketing activities for this market. Activities planned for the United States market include destination training and webinars, group media familiarization trips, roadshows, media events, visibility campaigns and joint campaigns with stakeholders.

Visit Maldives commences joint marketing campaign with Air Astana

Visit Maldives kicks off a joint marketing campaign with Air Astana, the flag carrier of Kazakhstan, to promote Maldives as one the most safest and most preferred holiday destinations for Kazkh travelers. The main aim of this joint campaign is to maintain the momentum of the arrivals from the market.

The campaign with Air Astana includes components targeting both B2B and B2C segments. The marketing activities consist of familiarization trips, webinars targeting travel agencies and consumer advertising campaigns such as digital campaigns, ambient outdoor campaigns and radio advertisements. The activities planned in this campaign will aid in maintaining the destination presence in the Kazakh market.

The first activity of the campaign kicked off on 21st April 2021 with the arrival of the first group of travel agents for a familiarization trip. During their week-long stay, the travel agents will explore the various offerings provided in Kanuhura Maldives and Six Senses Laamu. Afterwards, a second group of travel agents are set to arrive on 26th April 2021, hosted by Adaaran Select Meedhupparu Resort, Velassaru Maldives and Dhigali Maldives.

Air Astana commenced the first direct flight to Maldives on 5th December 2020. This was a stepping stone towards establishing a connection between the two destinations and working towards improving flight connectivity between Maldives and the rest of the world. Last year, a webinar was conducted in collaboration with Air Astana to commemorate the start of the direct flights from Almaty. Over 150 travel agents from Kazakhstan joined this webinar which was conducted in December 2020. The latest information about the destination and the arrival and departure procedures in the new normal were highlighted during this session.

The start of direct flights to Maldives by Air Astana were reflected in the arrival statistics, with the Kazakhstan market landing a spot in the top 5 in terms of arrivals to the Maldives, for the first time. As of 14th April 2021, a total of 345,261 travelers have arrived in the Maldives of which 14,567 travelers are from the Kazakhstan market.

Visit Maldives is conducting several campaigns targeting the Russia and CIS region. As such a media familiarisation trip has been conducted from Russia and Kazakhstan in February 2021, inviting some of the top media from these markets to experience the destination.

Maldives reopened its borders for tourists of all nationalities on 15th July 2020, with rigorous procedures in place to ensure the safety of tourists and tourism workers. Tourists who have not received the final dose of the vaccine at least 14 days prior to arrival are required to fill an online health declaration form within 24 hours prior to their departure, as well as have a negative PCR test result, conducted 96 hours prior to their departure. Travelers who have received the final dose of the vaccine 14 days prior to arrival in Maldives will be able to enter the destination without a negative PCR test.

Maldives Promotes Muslim Friendly Tourism at ATM 2021

Maldives Halal Travel (MHT) and its platform of products has been launched at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2021. MHT products includes, exclusive halal news, offers, Maldives Halal Travel Magazine (Print & Digital), Muslim Friendly Travel Rating (MFTR), advisory & consultancy, PR & marketing, trainings, conferences, specialized content creation, visiting designated halal travel fairs & expos as well as hosting Halal Travel Awards.

Maldives Halal Travel, which is an initiative spearheaded by Dr. Hussein Sunny Umar, was launched at ATM by the Managing Director of Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation, Mr. Thoyyib Mohamed.

Upon launching of the platform, the founder, and Managing Director of MHT Sunny Umar said it is a potential market worth over USD 189 billion. The goal of MHT is to drive Muslim travellers to the Maldives especially from the GCC region.

We need to work on digitalization to create a better tourist experience

– Ms. Natalia Bayona,
UNWTO Director of Innovation, Education and Investments

Photo by: Baros Maldives

MONTH IN REVIEW

Maldives Participates in the Tourism Recovery Summit

Maldives participated in the Tourism Recovery Summit held in Riyad, Saudi Arabia organized by the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia. The Maldives delegation, headed by Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom consisted of Mr. Ibrahim Farhad, Senior Policy Director and Ms. Shukurana Mohamed, Legal Officer of the Ministry of Tourism. Minister Dr. Mausoom, took part in the opening panel discussion of this summit and briefed delegates on the Maldives tourism recovery. Leaders from the tourism industry across the Middle East as well as the UNWTO Secretary General participated in this summit and discussed the most critical issues facing the restart and sustainable recovery of the industry.

During his visit to Saudi Arabia, Minister Dr. Abdulla Mausoom also attended the opening ceremony of the UNWTO Middle East Regional Office in Rayadh. This ceremony was also attended by the Secretary General of UNWTO, H.E. Zurab Pololikashvili, the Minister of Tourism of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Ahmed Alkhateeb, and Princess Haifa Bint Mohammed.

Minister of Tourism Meets with International Stakeholders During his Visit to Saudi Arabia

On the sidelines of Tourism Recovery Summit, the Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom met with some of the International tourism stakeholders.

As such on 26th May a meeting with the Senior Vice President & Acting CEO of World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Ms. Maribel Rodriguez was held. Discussions were carried out on possible areas of collaboration between the Maldives and WTTC.

On 27th May, Minister Dr. Mausoom met with H.E Zayed R. Alzayani, the Minister of Industry, Commerce & Tourism of the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Chairman of GulfAir and discussed on tourism corporation and introducing a Bahrain-Maldives dual destination holiday for European market.

On 28th May, Minister Dr. Mausoom, met with the Secretary General of the UNWTO, , H.E. Zurab Pololikashvili and shared the Maldives experience in dealing with the current global pandemic. The discussions also focused on UNWTO's engagement in Maldives Tourism Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2022.

Minister Dr. Mausoom also met with the Ambassador of Maldives to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Mohamed Khaleel and discussed ways to strengthen the partnership for tourism cooperation between the Maldives and Saudi Arabia.

Ministry of Tourism Holds Discussions with the Newly Elected Council Members on Community-Based Tourism

The Ministry of Tourism initiated an introductory meeting with the newly elected Mayors and Presidents of City Councils and Atoll Councils to discuss community-based tourism in the Maldives. At a virtual meeting held on 18th May 2021, the Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, along with the staff of Tourism Diversification and Localization Project of the Ministry of Tourism. Minister briefed the councilors on the project and its importance and benefits. Councilors expressed their support to this project which is expected to bring benefits of tourism directly to the people. The Ministry will work closely with City and Atoll councils to develop community-based tourism in the Maldives.

Minister of Tourism speaks to WION

Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom spoke to WION, a global news channel based in India, on Maldives Tourism. He spoke about the importance of Indian tourist market to the Maldives and briefed on the restrictive measure Maldives had to take due to the current spike in COVID-19 cases in India and the South Asia region. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) of the Maldives announced temporary suspension of tourist visas effective from 13th May 2021, for those originating from South Asian countries to the Maldives.

He thanked the Indian government for all the assistance being provided to the Maldives by the Indian government during this pandemic, including the supply of COVID-19 vaccine.

Director of Ocean Geographic Society calls on Minister of Tourism

Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom meets with Mr. Michael Aw, the Director of Ocean Geographic Society and discussed possible collaboration to publish an Ocean Geographic Special for Maldives Tourism Golden Year 2022.

Mr. Aw is a wildlife photographer, explorer and an ocean advocate. In 1999, he led a team of 44 for the world's first 24-hour documentation of a submerged reef, Maaya Thila in the Maldives. The feature-length documentary "24Hours Beneath the Rainbow Sea" was produced for the National Geographic Channel and a commemorative book of the same title was published in 2000.

Ministry of Tourism Begins Random Inspection of Tourist Facilities in Inhabited Islands

Ministry of Tourism has commenced conducting a nation-wide random inspection of guesthouses and hotels in the Maldives. These inspections are carried out to check the compliance of tourist facilities in the local islands to safety protocols and guideline set in place by the Health Protection Agency and the Ministry of Tourism. This measure is important for the safety of tourists, employees and the general public.

MITDC Signs an MOU with the Save Planet Earth

The Maldives Integrated Tourism Development Corporation signed an MOU with the Save Planet Earth, a famous NGO from the United Kingdom. Under this MOU, several environment related activities are planned to be carried out over the course of next five years. Some of the activities include, planting 1 million trees in different islands of Maldives, contributing to the program on safeguarding of mangroves, beach cleaning activities, waste management programs as well as other environment activities for the tourism sector of the Maldives.

Sea Turtle Conservation on L. Gaadhoo

By: Six Senses Laamu

On June 16th, as the nation celebrates World Sea Turtle Day, the tourism industry is presented with the opportunity to highlight these incredible animals. Six Senses Laamu and their partners, the Olive Ridley Project (ORP), will be utilizing this occasion to raise awareness for the most important green sea turtle nesting site in the country, situated just minutes from the resort.

Gaadhoo sits in the largest channel opening in the Maldives, making it an amazing place to spot an array of megafauna. Yet, what makes the island stand out on a national stage is its beach, home to the highest number of green sea turtle nests in the country. Of the 14 islands decreed as turtle nesting hot spots by the Maldivian government in 2006, Gaadhoo recorded up to four times the number of nests in comparison to the other locations.

ORP is on a mission to protect sea turtles and their habitats in the Indian Ocean through research, rehabilitation, education and outreach. Since 2018, a sea turtle biologist has been stationed at Six Senses Laamu, conducting education programs for guests and the local community, as well as research focusing on Laamu's turtle populations, nesting, and ghost nets found in the area. Six Senses Laamu neighbors Gaadhoo, making it a

prime location for the team to monitor nesting activity on this remarkable island.

Gaadhoo's significance was officially recorded in the 1980s with an estimate of 240 nests a year and at least 10 turtles coming to nest per night. Back then, the locals acted as custodians of the nesting beach and protected the nests from poaching. Over time, the beach patrols ceased, and in 2015, the residents of Gaadhoo were moved to a different island. With no permanent inhabitants who could deter illegal activities, poaching is now a prevalent issue on the island. The Maldives Marine Research Institute estimated just 142 nests were laid on Gaadhoo in 2016, a 40% decline in nesting from 1980, illustrating the need for further research and conservation efforts.

Since the start of their partnership, ORP and Six Senses Laamu have made significant steps in helping this situation and, through ad-hoc surveys, ORP have recorded a decrease in poaching activity from 68.4% in 2018 to 37.5% in 2019. The team have also put a huge emphasis on community outreach, keeping Laamu's stakeholders up to date on their findings through quarterly meetings, incorporating Gaadhoo into their 'Hello Hallu' school program and making turtle conservation a focus of the annual Laamafaru Festival. For guests who visit Six Senses Laamu, they learn about this unique island whilst passing it on dolphin cruises, experiencing turtle hatching firsthand and through weekly presentations from ORP's turtle biologist.

Gaadhoo's nesting beach is key in ensuring the survival of the population of green sea turtles in Laamu and across the Maldives. In light of this, and with the support of the Laamu community, ORP and Six Senses Laamu hope the island continues to be a green sea turtle sanctuary for generations to come.

Dusit Thani Maldives Puts Guests nose-to-nose with Fascinating Fish as Manta Ray Season Begins

By: Dusit Thani Maldives

Mudhdhoo Island, 24 May 2021 – From May to November every year, Baa Atoll's protected marine park, Hanifaru Bay, comes alive with plankton, attracting manta rays and whale sharks to feed and play in the turquoise waters. Just 15 minutes away by boat, Dusit Thani Maldives offers its guests gracious hospitality, five-star luxury, and front-row seats to all the aquatic action for an unforgettable summer holiday.

Part of The Maldives' first UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, Mudhdhoo Island is home only to the resort for a truly immersive experience in the archipelago's stunning nature. Guests can stroll barefoot on pristine white shores, cycle through lush jungle, and slip directly into the ocean from luxurious over-water villas to snorkel the vibrant 360-degree house reef.

Marine marvels are an integral part of the Maldivian experience. The resort's Ocean Dive Centre provides access to an endless array of aquatic adventures. The centre's expert team is on alert throughout manta season, with up-to-the-minute information on feeding conditions in Hanifaru Bay. Just a short boat ride brings guests up close and personal with mantas, whale sharks and more.

Milaidhoo Island Maldives ranks 'Best of the Best' In Tripadvisor's Traveler Choice Awards

By: Milaidhoo Island Maldives

Milaidhoo has been acclaimed among the top holiday properties in the world, being allowed to carry the 'Best of the Best' badge yet for another year as voted by the Tripadvisor Community. Milaidhoo has also been recognised as the third most romantic resort in Asia and 16th worldwide as well overall ninth in the Top Resorts in Asia.

General Manager Shuhan says: "It's with great happiness and pride to learn that even during this difficult year, our Milaidhoo family continues to impress guests with impeccable service, passion and love."

Due to the pandemic the resort was closed for several months only re-opening its shores in October 2020. Milaidhoo implemented a rigorous hygiene and safety protocol and managed to adhere to the new reality while delivering caring and personalised service to guests, giving them a much needed break from the restrictions of the pandemic.

A MALDIVIAN FAVORITE: RIHAAKURU

By: Aminath Manal Musthafa

A unique staple of Maldivian cuisine, Rihaakuru, used to be a lifesaving food in challenging times. Maldivian cuisine being heavily dependent on catch from the sea, bad weather frequently led to tougher times. In these cases, Rihaakuru was an invaluable source of protein as well as an accompaniment to feed large families. Not only was Rihakuru delicious, its long shelf-life allowed families to fill their hunger throughout the rainy monsoon when fish was scarce. There has been historical evidence that Maldivian travellers introduced Rihakuru to the people of Ceylon, who also considered it as a delicacy. From the early days to the present time, Rihaakuru is considered a necessity in Maldivian households.

Rihaakuru is a fish paste made from the remnants of tuna. It has tuna balls in it, known as "bondi" in Dhivehi. It is thick in consistency and brown in color due to its prolonged preparation process. Rihaakuru is, the end result of cooking tuna in water and salt for several hours, while carefully removing the froth. In this process, bones and chunks of tuna are also removed whilst cooking it in huge woodstoves until a thick paste, Rihaakuru, is formed.

Rihaakuru is a food of convenience as it can be eaten as it is. A spoonful is enough to eat with cooked plain rice or Maldivian flat bread locally knows as "Roshi". Though cooking isn't necessary, rihaakuru can be used in versatile ways and in several dishes. One local favourite is Rihaakuru dhiya, a diluted version made from Rihaakuru, coconut milk, onions, chili and other local ingredients. Rihaakuru dhiya can be enjoyed as a side dish with rice, breadfruit, taro, sweetpotato or Roshi. Another popular version is theulili rihaakuru which is seasoned with onions and other local ingredients, often found in Maldivian breakfasts.

Rihaakuru also has some cultural significance to it, as a Maldivian feast is incomplete without its presence. It is often found in Maldivian lunches and feasts and enjoyed in great deal. It is also used as a spicy snack, with mangoes called "Ambu Majaa" often, in picnics and is savored in the beach.

Rihaakuru, can literally be found in the bags of every Maldivian travelling abroad. It is sent in care packages to families and loved ones living away from the country so that they can get some homely food with minimal effort. Families also send fresh batches from their islands to their loved ones living in the Male' city and across the country. This traditional dish is an important part of Maldivian cuisine. It will be an authentic experience to try the various ways in which Rihaakuru is served in the Maldives.

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