

# INFLIGHT

ISSUE 01 | 2017 **MAGAZINE**



## JOINING THE FEEDING FRENZY?

DHONDHEENI:  
SOUTHERN SYMBOL

DID YOU KNOW?  
12 FACTS ABOUT THE MALDIVES  
THAT WILL AMAZE YOU

THREE EXCURSIONS  
YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE  
IN THE MALDIVES





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# EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to this new edition of Inflight with a brand new look!

In this issue of Inflight, we bring you a collection of exciting articles written by seasoned writers which shed light on aspects of Maldivian tradition, culture and its unique nature. Written by authors who have lived & worked here and know the country intimately, they offer interesting details that you would read for the first time in their articles.

Our regular contributor, Verena Wiesbauer writes about the feeding frenzy of stingrays that you can see and experience in many of the resorts in the Maldives and gives you tips on how to do it safely & avoid mishaps during the process. In our second article, Barbara Tori reveals twelve amazing facts about the Maldives in her article "Did You Know".

In his maiden article to Inflight, Daniel Bosley writes about Dhondheeni, a bird native only to the south of Maldives and largely seen as the symbol of Addu or Seenu Atoll and looks at the unique history of the atoll. Lastly, Eleonora Fiorini recommends the top three excursions every visitor should go on while in the Maldives. Maybe you can pack your bags and experience these adventures yourself on your next holiday.

Enjoy!

**Adheel Ismail**

Editor

# AUTHORS



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**ELEONORA FIORINI**

Eleonora Fiorini, restaurateur and founder of Maldivology, is an enthusiastic traveller and has been in love with the Maldives since her honeymoon in 2007.



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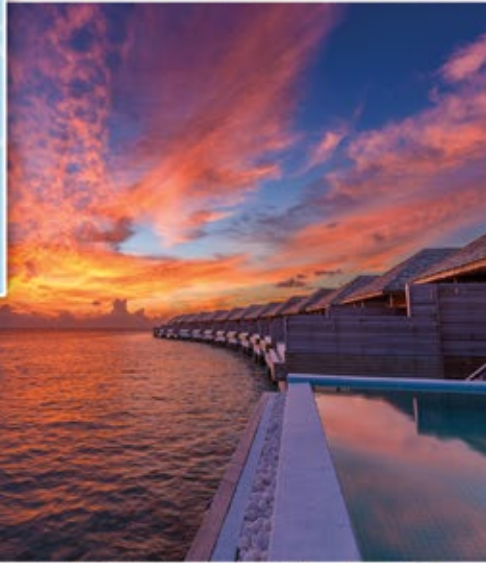
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# GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRMAN



A warm welcome to all our passengers!

As you fasten your seat belt, get ready for one of the most exciting flights you have ever taken on your travels. Get ready, for an incredible and unforgettable experience.

As we head towards your dream destination, you will witness some breathtaking views that only the Maldives, and a seaplane, can offer.

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We take great pride at being the fastest, safest, most convenient means of transport in this island nation. And we shall continue to do our utmost to ensure that TMA is the preferred choice of travel within the Maldives.

Have a safe, and enjoyable flight and a fantastic stay in the Maldives.

**Richard B. Saldanha**

Chairman



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# WELCOME ON BOARD



Welcome to the paradise!

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Trans Maldivian Airways is one of the first air services operator in the Maldives and has now grown to become the largest seaplane operator in the world. Today, we operate a fleet of 45 DHC-6 Twin Otter aircraft, a highly versatile twin-engine turbine powered aircraft, which makes it the ideal aircraft for the island archipelago of the Maldives. We now serve more than 60 resort destinations and in the process operate more than 100,000 flights a year.

We take pride on the coveted titles won by TMA in 2016. We were humbled to receive the Tourism Pioneer Award, 2016 at the 23rd Annual World Travel Awards hosted in Maldives. This award symbolizes the pivotal role that TMA has played over the last 25 years not only in the growth of tourism in Maldives but also in enabling the economic development of the country. TMA was also conferred upon the title of Indian Ocean's Leading Seaplane Operator for the third consecutive year.

Going forward, we shall thrive to innovate and further improve upon our own high standards and benchmarks in order to deliver the best experience to you.

As you inch closer to your island resort, we wish you a wonderful stay in Maldives and hope you can create delightful memories of your Sun, Sand, Sea and Seaplane holiday.

**A.U.M. Fawzy**  
CEO



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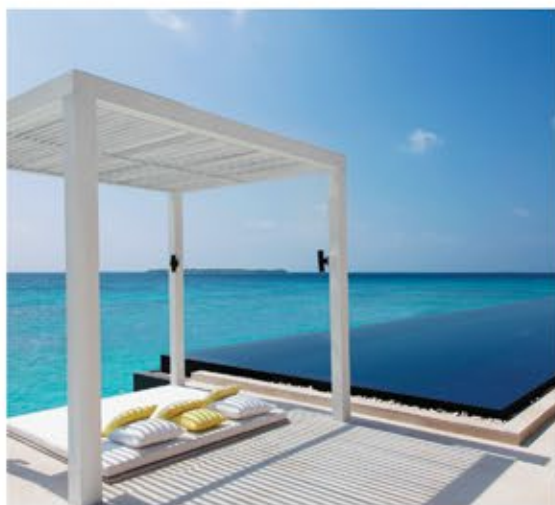
*\*Guests booking a minimum of three nights at Kuda Huraa and three nights at Landaa Giraavaru will receive complimentary seaplane transfers for two between the two resorts. Quote 'Paradise Twice' when booking.*



LANDAA GIRAAVARU

# WELLNESS JOURNEYS AT CHEVAL BLANC RANDHELI

---



On the unspoilt Noonu Atoll, 40-minutes north of Malé by seaplane, Cheval Blanc Randheli is the expression of ultimate luxury offering tailor-made activities, unforgettable experiences and bespoke surprises.

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In addition to daily spa treatments, guests are invited to partake in a gentle daily fitness activity, such as the Sunrise Yoga with the Maison's own yoga master, a serene session overlooking the pristine waters of the Indian Ocean. To complete this cycle of well-being, the Maison's renowned chefs create a tailor-made daily menu of healthful and inspiring meals, designed individually to address specific lifestyle needs.

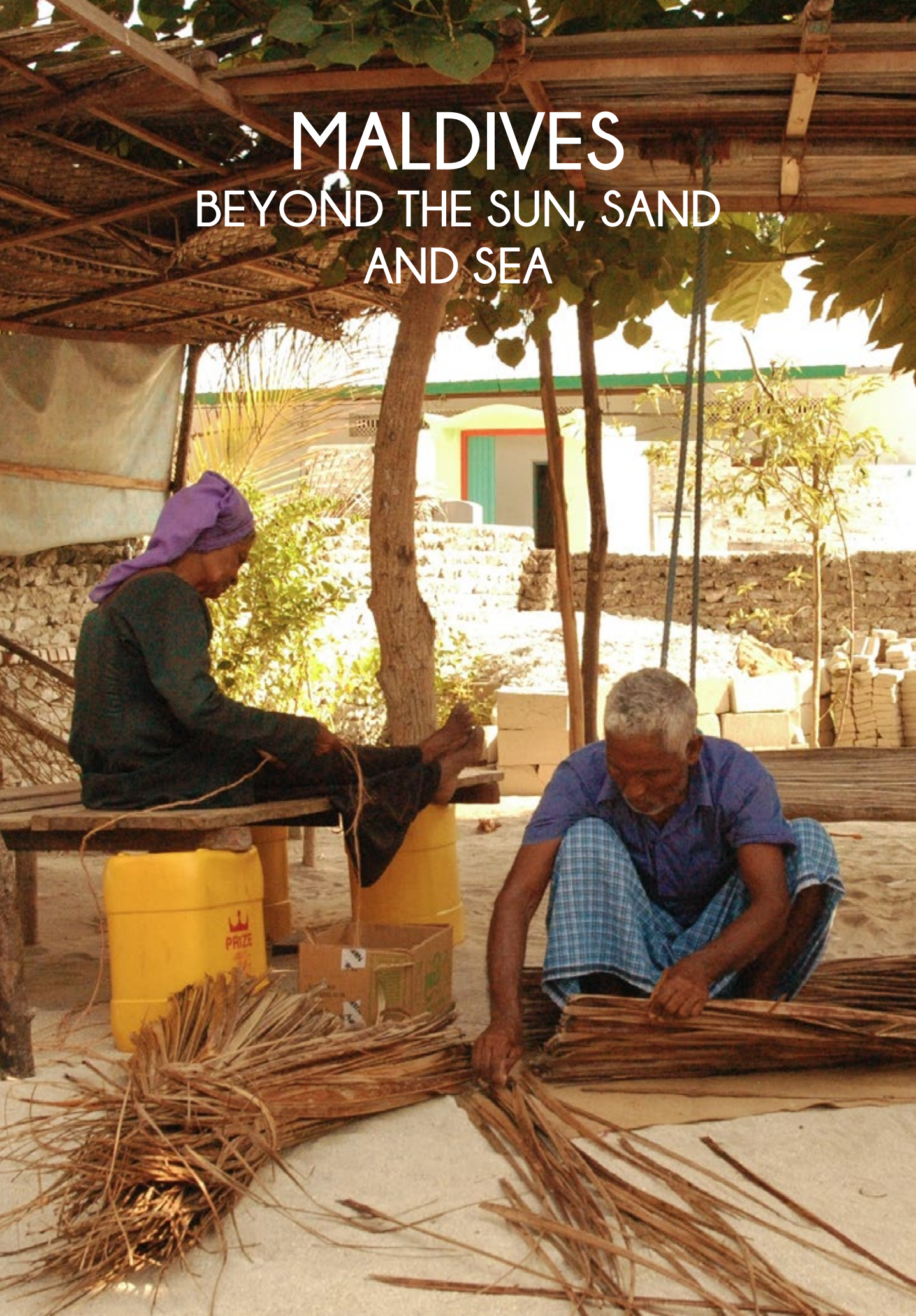
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# MALDIVES

## BEYOND THE SUN, SAND AND SEA







## GEOGRAPHY

The Maldives consists of approximately 1,190 coral islands grouped in a double chain of 27 atolls, spread over roughly 90,000 square kilometers, making the country one of the most unique destinations in the world. The islands stretch over a distance of 800 km from north to south.

## CLIMATE

The temperature of Maldives ranges between 24°C and 33°C throughout the year. Although the humidity is relatively high, the constant sea breeze helps to keep the air moving. The average sea temperature is around 26°C.

## POPULATION

The population of Maldives has increased rapidly during the last few decades. However with a population of approximately 400,000, the country still remains one of the smallest independent nations in the world.



## RELIGION

Maldivians are devout Muslims and rigorously follow the basic tenets of Islam. The Islamic Center which accommodates more than 5,000 worshippers dominates the skyline of the capital city Male' with its shining golden dome and minaret. Several mosques are dispersed throughout the capital and each inhabited island is graced with at least one or two mosques where the people attend to their daily prayers.

## HISTORY

Archeological remains excavated in different parts of the country prove that people were living here as early as third century BC. The Maldives and its people are mentioned in several mariners' logs and records of naval expeditions by the Chinese and the Arabs and later the British and other European explorers.



## CULTURE

A proud history and rich culture evolved from the first settlers who were from various parts of the world travelling the seas in ancient times. The Maldives has been a melting pot of different cultures as people from different parts of the world came here and settled down. Some of the local music and dance for instance resemble African influences, while other cultures and traditions reflect East Asian and South Asian characteristics and traits.

## LANGUAGE

Dhivehi, spoken throughout the Maldives, is a language belonging to the Indo-Iranian group of languages. The language is spoken only in the Maldives and Minicoy Island in the Lakshadweep Atoll (India) to the north of the Maldives. The present script, Thaana was introduced in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and is written from right to left. English is widely spoken by Maldivians and visitors can easily make themselves understood getting around the capital Male'. In the resorts, a variety of languages are spoken by the staff including English, German, French, Italian, Japanese and Chinese.

### CAPITAL ISLAND

Male', with a total area of 5.8 km<sup>2</sup>, is the capital of the country. It is the center of administration and the hub of trade and commerce. More than 150,000 people live in Male'.

### ECONOMY

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the economy changed from the age-old traditional system based on fisheries and agriculture to a modern economy that rode on the success of the newly established tourism industry and a modernized and mechanized fishing industry. Maldivians enjoy the highest GDP per capita in South Asia today.



### CURRENCY

The local currency is Rufiyaa. At the time of publication, the exchange rate is pegged at MVR 15.42 to a US Dollar. If you are heading to a resort, you need not worry about local currency as all your bills at the resort can be paid by US Dollar, Euro or any other European currency. All major credit cards are also accepted at the resorts. However, if you are visiting Male' or any of the local islands, you may need to hold local currency for purchases you may wish to make.

### EDUCATION

Maldives boasts one of the highest literacy rates in the world with 98% of the country's population being able to read and write. Educational standards are among the highest in the region and schools follow the British system of education.



### HEALTH

The Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH) in Male' is the state run general hospital in the country providing a high standard of medical care. ADK Hospital is one of the private health care facility in the country among several other private hospitals and clinics. Most resorts have a resident doctor and a decompression chamber is within easy reach in case of a diving emergency.





### **BUSINESS HOURS**

The working week in Maldives begins on Sunday and ends on Thursday. Government offices are open from 0800 to 1400 hours and the private sector from 0900 to 1700 hours. Most offices in the private sector open for business on Saturdays. Weekend falls on Friday and Saturday.

### **COMMUNICATION**

All resorts offer IDD telephone services. Mobile telephone services in the country are offered by Dhiraagu and Ooredoo Maldives. Both companies have roaming agreements with various operators across the globe, which will enable you to use your home number while in Maldives. All the resorts in Maldives offer Internet services. Some resorts offer broadband connections in the room while others offer WiFi zones at key locations on the island.

### **SHOPPING**

The northern end of Chaandhane Magu in Male' is the place to be if you are looking for souvenirs to take home. A range of batik sarongs and wraparounds, wooden handicrafts, candles and other knick knacks are available from the shops lining the street. You will also be able to find some souvenir items if you visit the neighboring islands near your resort. Lookout for genuine Maldivian hand painted t-shirts and lacquered boxes, miniature dhonis and reed mats if you really want to take a piece of Maldives with you as a memento.

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# JOINING THE FEEDING FRENZY?

by Verena Wiesbauer, MSc





“Is that what killed the... Australian... what was his name? – “Steve Irwin.” – “Oh yes, Steve Irwin!”. This is probably the most common phrase I have heard in my career when resort guests gather for the daily Stingray feeding activity.

Steve Irwin’s accident largely remains a mystery to many, especially to stingray feeders. With no video being released, one can refer to only a short report by the cameraman Justin Lyons who witnessed the tragic death of his friend, the famous ‘Crocodile Hunter’. While filming a documentary for the series “Ocean’s Deadliest” at Batt Reef, near Port Douglas, Queensland, Irwin reportedly decided to snorkel in shallow waters and approached a sting ray with the intention to film it swimming away. According to the incident’s only witness, “All of a sudden, it propped on its front and started stabbing wildly with its tail.” First

believing he only had a punctured lung, the stingray’s barb pierced his heart, and in combination with a venom that wound caused him to bleed to death. Even though the so-called “official video” of the accident released on the internet is far from reality, the accident has affected people from all around the world and particularly stuns holiday-makers in the Maldives watching several sting rays, equipped with venomous serrated barbs, surrounding the only person feeding them in the shallow lagoon - fearlessly.

In the Maldives, methods, time of feeding and quality of food are as diverse as the species that are attracted by the daily frenzy. While some resorts give a show with one of their team members - up to his neck in the water - being surrounded by hungry sting rays, others let guests hand-feed the rays either from the beach or a jetty. These flat cartilaginous fish - closely related to sharks - may receive anything from fresh tuna chunks directly from the

island’s butchery, to mere bony leftovers tossed into the sea. Sting rays are not the only marine creatures which gather for the treat; they may be accompanied by Blacktip Reef sharks, Nurse sharks, Bluefin jacks and Giant Trevallies or even hundreds of remoras, all of which are often more successful in grabbing the tuna chunks compared to the clumsy bottom-feeding sting rays. Injuries inflicted by trevallies to the feeder are not uncommon and though not venomous, their sharp dorsal spines can create deep wounds in humans and should not be underestimated.

It is remarkable how the sting rays can adapt to the resort’s regular feeding time, whether this may be in the late morning, afternoon, evening or even late night. Guests are surprised by their punctuality when they arrive at the shore and wait for food, be it their “inner clock” or an acquired instinct to know where to find a treat. But the effects of wildlife feeding demonstrations are controversial: Studies in Grand Cayman Island have shown strong differences between hand-fed



animals that demonstrated a notable inversion of diel activity, being constantly active during the day with little movement at night, compared to the nocturnally active wild stingrays. Not only did hand-fed stingrays roam around significantly smaller activity spaces compared to their totally wild counterparts, i.e. staying rather close to the tourist sites, but they also showed a high degree of overlap in their core activity spaces, compared to wild stingrays, which are largely solitary. An increased density of individuals in a small area, altering natural behaviour and populations, possibly increased parasitic loads and injuries, and the dependency and familiarization with humans seem to contradict the argument of feeding being an example par excellence of the non-consumptive utilization of wildlife helping to spread awareness and promote conservation.

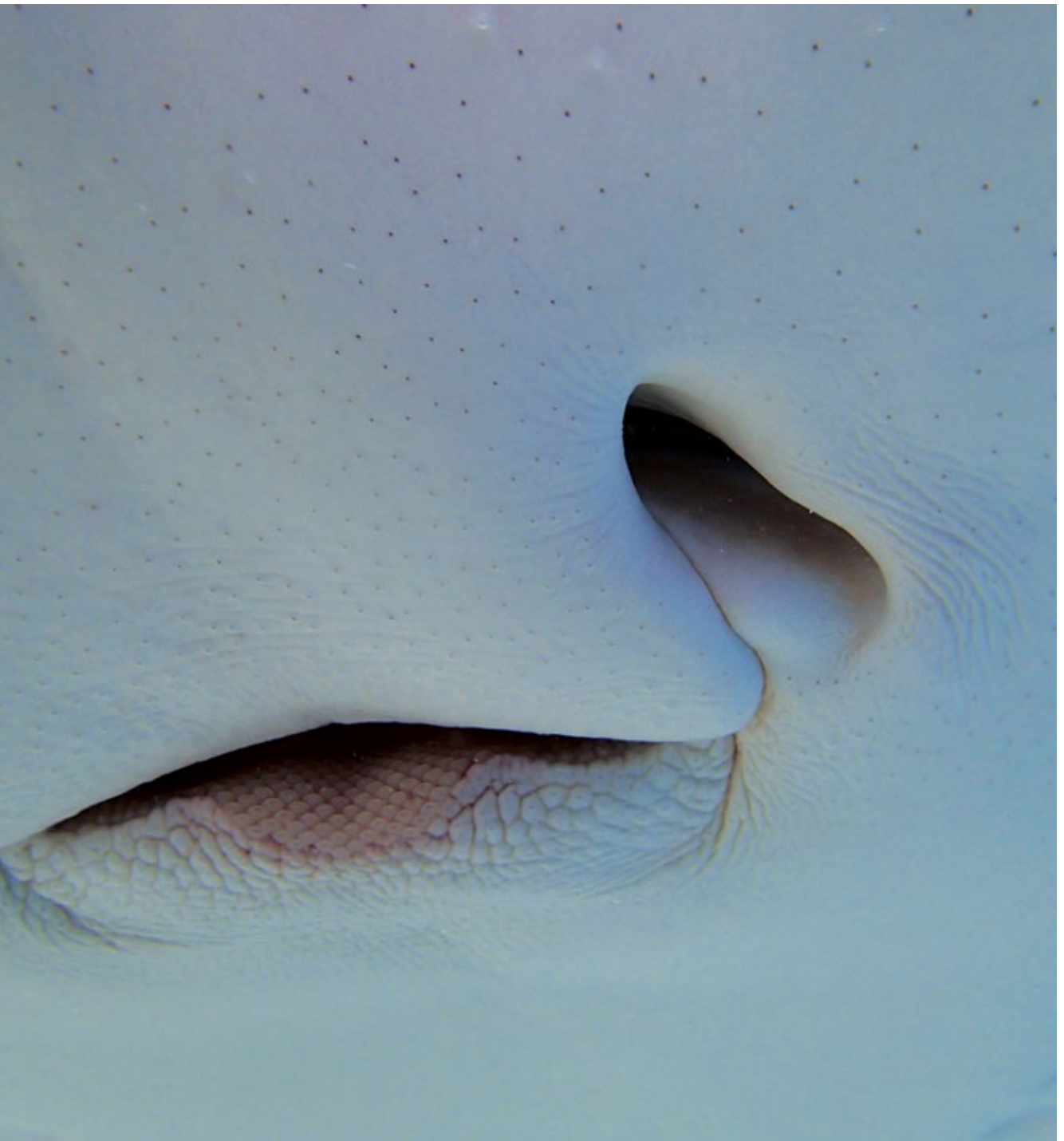
Thus, if you attend a stingray feeding attraction at a Maldivian resort, you might want to ask yourself the following questions: How much education and awareness is being provided, in comparison to how much this is altering the natural environment? Undoubtedly, humans have already changed the sting ray's diet and diurnal cycle by providing food for them on a

regular basis, but there are indicators which can help you determine at what cost to the animal this is being done:

First of all, look at the person feeding. Are they a designated individual from the resort, educated in stingray biology? What is the quality of food – unspoiled cuttings from the kitchen, or clearly bony left-overs infested by flies? How much information is given on stingray behaviour and their anatomy, with a focus on the venomous barb? How much attention is being given to safety: are guests allowed to go into the water with the stingrays during the feeding hour? Check for serious injuries on the stingray's upper body – deep wounds are signs of an uncontrolled feeding frenzy (unless only found on females during mating time). Touching of the sensitive fish skin should never be allowed in order to avoid giving the creatures infections. Also, see if any other animals have access to the same food, in particular sharks, which are likely to lose their natural respect for humans when being fed by them, and could eventually end up demonstrating aggressive behaviour towards snorkelers.







Should you find yourself snorkeling in a shallow lagoon and stingrays surround you, you have likely entered a feeding area at a time close to the event. Stay calm and do not make any quick movements, slowly swim away from the area and either get back to the shore or continue your snorkel trip at the reef edge. Even though sting rays may be over-excited and repeatedly come back to you around the feeding time, they are very unlikely to attack humans unless feeling severely threatened. These alien-looking creatures may possess a dangerous weapon on their tail, but are in fact gentle giants which will only strike out when in fear of an extreme threat. Rather like puppies, they get excited at the prospect of food, and just like with canines; show them the respect in the way you treat them and in return they will do the same with you.

# Soneva Jani opens in Noonu Atoll, Maldives

The Soneva story continues with Soneva Jani, the luxury resort operator's newest property, located in the Noonu Atoll, Maldives. The primarily overwater resort comprises 24 water villas and one island villa situated in a 5.6km lagoon, one of the largest in the Maldives.

The resort is built around the 150-acre island of Medhufaru, and surrounded by four other untouched islands within the lagoon. The resort comprises 18 units of one-bedroom water villas, four two-bedroom water villas, one three-bedroom and one four-bedroom water villa, as well as a four-bedroom island villa. At more than 410 square metres, the one bedroom villas are the largest entry-level villas in the Indian Ocean.

"It has been said that if Soneva Fushi was its own island, Soneva Jani is its own 'atoll', as it's actually a small archipelago of five islands (four of them deserted) within the Medhufaru lagoon," said Sonu Shivdasani, the CEO and founder of Soneva. "In fact, Medhufaru island is the largest tourist island in the Maldives. Plus, the lagoon is huge; more than 7,000 Olympic swimming pools can fit inside it. In this massive space with the islands and the lagoon, there are only 25 villas. It's one of the lowest density resorts in the world, by far."

All villas include a 13m private pool on the outdoor deck, a walk-in mini bar, uninterrupted lagoon views with direct access, and many of them have water slides from the top deck into the water below. This is in addition to a top deck dining area, an outdoor patio with a sunken dining table, a study and a sleeping-area for children (conveniently located within the main bedroom so that parents can be assured their children are never too far from them in an overwater environment). Three different glass-bottomed areas in each villa guarantee that the underwater world is never too far away. Soneva's ubiquitous chocolate parlours, ice-cream rooms and Mr./Ms. Friday butler service is also provided to all guests.

Another unique feature of the villas are the retractable roofs in the master bedroom, which slide back at the touch of a button to reveal the night sky for stargazing. If guests want a closer look, they can visit Soneva Jani's Observatory, which is the first overwater observatory in the Maldives. A sophisticated telescope rises through the floor of the observatory deck, surrounded by four

dining tables, where guests can dine and watch screens on the tables linked to the view from the telescope. The resort's resident Astronomer is available to help guests discover the secrets of the universe.

The resort also features the largest overwater structure in the Maldives. At three storeys tall, The Gathering is the heart of the resort and houses the various dining outlets, which serve global cuisine, as well as the spa, library, retail area, wine cellar and Children's Den. A Soleni Dive Centre and Marine Biology Champa are located next to The Gathering.

All guests are provided with bicycles or tricycles to help navigate the fun, snaking jetty that connects to the main island, home to Cinema Paradiso, Screwpine Alley, the Gardens and Labyrinth, and various walking and cycle paths. A shuttle boat service is also available to transport guests around the resort, should they prefer. Cinema Paradiso is an open-air, overwater cinema, where guests will be given Bluetooth headphones so as not to disturb the nesting turtles and other wildlife in the area.

While being a luxury resort, Soneva Jani's eco-credentials strongly reflect the brand's 'intelligent luxury' ethos, with fresh organic produce grown in farms on the island, as well as a recycling program and recycled glassware made at Soneva Fushi's Glass Studio. The pools use seawater with UV filtration and the villas have been built over the sandy floors of the lagoon, with no damage to any part of the reef. Furthermore, solar PV will be a significant source of power generation at the resort, all wastewater is collected and treated on-site, and water is also produced on-site, including drinking water, using desalination.

Located only 40 minutes from the capital Male, guests can arrive by seaplane, which lands at the floating airport situated in the deepest part of the lagoon, or by a 60-minute speedboat journey from the sister resort, Soneva Fushi.

In addition to Soneva Jani, Soneva owns and operates Soneva Fushi in the Maldives and Soneva Kiri in Thailand. Soneva in Aqua, an ultra-luxurious yacht, was launched in the Maldives in 2015 and sails out of Soneva Fushi. For more information about Soneva visit [www.soneva.com](http://www.soneva.com)





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# DID YOU KNOW? 12 FACTS ABOUT THE MALDIVES THAT WILL AMAZE YOU

by Barbara Tori





The Maldives is nothing short of amazing. Even the most seasoned travellers are bound to experience the utmost pleasure and joy when stood against a backdrop of what is easily the real-life depiction of paradise. The infinite blues, pierced by thousands of islands and sandbanks, heavenly accommodation and dining options, as well as leisure activities that are limited only by imagination, grab a hold of virtually every guests and refuse to let go. For you to truly appreciate the magnificence and uniqueness of the Maldives and to add pizzazz to the story of your Maldives, here is a compilation of a dozen facts that will certainly grant you an 'expert level' badge:



1. The Maldives is the flattest country in the world. Its highest point is just 2.4 meters above mean sea level.
2. The year-round air temperature is between 29 and 32 degrees Celsius and the water averages at balmy 28 degrees Celsius.
3. The country area is about the same size as Portugal's, with ninety-nine percent of it being water.
4. More than 2,000 species of fish and more than 200 species of coral have been identified in the Maldives.

## INFLIGHT

5. The Maldives is comprised of 1,192 coral islands, which are grouped in a double chain of 26 atolls. Atolls are ring-shaped reefs that came to be as volcanoes subsided and sea levels rose. The word 'atoll' originates in Dhivehi, the country's national language.

6. The Maldives is home to the world's largest known population of reef manta rays. The Manta Trust estimates that the waters are home to around 5,000 mantas, with more than 3,000 of them already identified.

7. With a fleet of 45 Twin Otters, Trans Maldivian Airways is the world's largest seaplane operator.

8. Many of the islands are used as nesting grounds for sea turtles. Turtles will often return to the very same beach to lay their own eggs.

9. For daylight saving purposes, a lot of resorts observe 'island time', which is 1 hour ahead of Male' time.

10. Weather patterns can vary greatly across the archipelago. The islands receive plenty of sun throughout the year and the best time to visit is between January and December.

11. Maldives' resorts are full of ingenious engineering and superlatives: Guests can dance the night away at an underwater club, rejuvenate at an underwater spa or even dine with schools of fish whizzing past their table in the world's largest all-glass undersea restaurant.

12. The unofficial motto of the resorts is 'No shoes, no news'. Scrunch your toes in the sand and live up to it!











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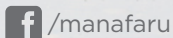
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A photograph of the interior of the Undersea Restaurant in Hurawalhi Maldives. The restaurant is built inside a curved tunnel that opens up to a vast underwater world. The ceiling and walls are made of clear glass, providing a panoramic view of the reef and the surrounding water. Numerous colorful fish, including clownfish and damselfish, are seen swimming around the restaurant. The lighting is a deep blue, creating a serene and immersive atmosphere. In the foreground, several tables are set with white tablecloths, glassware, and plates, ready for diners. The tables are arranged in a line, leading towards the end of the tunnel where a large opening reveals the reef outside.

# 5.8

## Undersea Restaurant HURAWALHI MALDIVES

Leaving her diving equipment behind on the jetty, Paige Bennett tingles with excitement as she briskly walks to the front window of the undersea restaurant to show us the miniature reef ecosystem that she has created. 'It was always a hope of mine that I would come to 5.8 one afternoon to check on the coral growth and see a giant moray eel making a home in the reef – and look, this is already the second one!'

Paige, an enthusiastic diving instructor with broad marine conservation experience, started an initiative of great ecological value back in May 2016: coral gardening outside 5.8 Undersea Restaurant. 'Prodivers and I wanted to create an extension of the existing reef that would represent, on a small scale, the beauty of the Maldives' underwater while at the same time reviving marine life that had, at the time, been weakened by the El Niño. With a carefully devised plan of action, a team of divers dislodged some blocks of coral that showed few signs of life and placed them onto the shelves surrounding the restaurant. Just one day after the first coral planting was complete, the area was covered with damselfish, wrasse were feeding in the sand, and pairs of butterflyfish were

hovering over the reef. 'Fish life around the restaurant is nothing short of amazing', adds Mie Shaahh, a local who was instrumental in the project. 'Dreams don't work unless you do' - and what a dreamy hustle-bustle of marine life it is!

Hurawalhi Island Resort is located inside a reef channel through which nutrient-rich water gets funnelled into the atoll. 5.8 Undersea Restaurant, in particular, lies in a bay that experiences a constant backwash current, creating a potential for the reefs to thrive. Diners at the world's largest and deepest undersea restaurant will not only be in for a variety of treats served on their plates, but will also get to admire amazing views of the new coral reef that Paige and the team brought to life. At the moment, you can see more than 100 different species of fish living on the reef, including everyone's favourite clownfish. 'Coral bleaching had devastating consequences on anemones. Water temperature of 32 degrees Celsius induced stress on anemones, causing them to release photosynthetic algae they use to create energy into the water.' Anemones became white and shriveled, but within a couple of days the team noticed that the 20 bleached



# The reef outside the worlds largest all-glass undersea restaurant is in bloom



anemones were turning brown again and within 2 weeks they had become healthy and full with clownfish laying eggs around them. The new location with favourable currents and temperature helped them to regain the algae quickly enough to prevent them from dying.

An additional piece in Hurawalhi's 'sustaining the reef' jigsaw puzzle is a sunken shipwreck, an artificial reef that already sees some vibrant marine life activity. Paige observes that the life around the wreck is different from other parts of the reef: 'Trumpetfish, moray eels, giant pufferfish and small groups of snappers have already made it their home. Hopefully we will have sponges and soft corals covering it in a few years.'

'No matter what time of the day you dine at the restaurant, you can see the most beautiful array of marine life in all colours of the rainbow. There are oriental sweetlips hovering under a table coral, giant trevallies hunting, jellyfish bioluminescing as they drift by in the current – I could list all of the species that one can expect to see during a meal, but I don't want to spoil the magic that's waiting here.'





# DHONDHEENI: SOUTHERN SYMBOL

by Daniel Bosley





Heading south over the Huvadhu Kandu, 23 of the Maldives' pearl-like atolls are strewn to the north behind you. Ahead, three more jewels await discovery, with Huvadhu, Fuvahmulah and Addu offering a precious culture and unique history.

Crossing the equator, you soon land in Gan International Airport, touching down on a small island with a big history. From here, just across the causeway, the symbol of the south awaits.

Proudly perched opposite this lagoon highway is the dhondheeni - otherwise known as the white tern; a bird native only to the south, and the symbol of Addu or Seenu atoll, personifying the region's identity and character.



Photography by Naj

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The bird's very name signifies the linguistic differences between the southern atolls and the rest of the country. While variations in the Dhivehi language can be found throughout the Maldives and Minicoy islands, these differences are most notable in the lower atolls, with those living above the Huvadhu Channel barely able to understand southern speech.

The name dhondheeni itself translates into the Addu language as simply 'white bird'. In standard Dhivehi, however - which uses the word dhooni for bird - the same combination of words (dhondhooni) actually means dragonfly.

Though standard Dhivehi is used for official purposes and in schools, Addu, Fuvahmulah, and Huvadhu each have their own distinct tongues. These dialects, spoken by just a few thousand people each, are said to correspond more closely than standard Dhivehi to the medieval Sinhalese once spoken in neighbouring Sri Lanka.

### **A BREED APART**

That the dhondheeni is confined to the south geographically as well as linguistically further secures its candidacy as the region's perfect mascot. Though terns are generally known to migrate for thousands of miles, the dhondheeni remains confined to the southern atolls.

It is perhaps this same confinement that gives the South its unique nature and strong independent streak. Though Male's leaders have always ruled over the region, practicalities had traditionally led southerners to favour travel across open ocean to the continent, rather than over treacherous reefs to reach their capital.

Indeed, the relative isolation of these atolls once made them the ideal destination for exiled Maldivian royals, periodically banished from Male's crowded political scene. Fuvahmulah in particular was largely inaccessible before modern transport developments; even the dhondheeni is yet to find its way there, despite nesting in islands to both the north and south.

### **FLYING SOLO**

The preponderance of the species in Addu has never been fully explained. Though an absence of competing crows is thought to be an important factor, the history of this particular struggle for colonisation is unknown.

But the general lack of outside occupation in the southern atolls has been another hallmark of its history. While those to the north have traditionally been beset by periodic invasions and occupations by marauding Malabars and proselytising Portuguese, the South's southerliness has kept it safe.



Photography by Naj





## ANGELS IN ADDU

Finally, the dhondheeni's unearthly qualities also make it ideal as the atolls' avian avatar. Often translucent in flight, many refer to it as the angel tern. Preferring wooded areas, sightings are most common on Addu's eastern island of Meedhoo. Here, it can often be seen hovering over Koagganu cemetery, the oldest in the Maldives and said to be the burial place of the country's first saints.

While the official conversion story of the Maldives depicts a Male'-based, sea-monster-slaying Berber named Abu al-Barakat as the man responsible for converting the then-Buddhist archipelago in 1153, southern historians tell their own tale.

Local accounts contend that a man named Yoosuf Gadir had arrived in Meedhoo 28 years earlier, launching his own proselytising mission from the south. Gadir's remains are said to be buried in the island's imposing graveyard, whose stark tombstones have stood proud amongst swaying palms and flapping angels for 900 years.

It is indeed no surprise that this beautiful bird has long been the soaring symbol of Seenu atoll. Having migrated to nesting sites on Huvadhu's southern shores in recent decades, perhaps it is time for the whole region to adopt the dhondheeni.

While your stay in the south will include all the classic sun, sea and sand of the Maldives, below the Huvadhu channel you are sure to encounter a rare breed of culture, language, and history in the heart of the Indian Ocean.



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An underwater photograph of a coral reef in the Maldives. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and the coral structures are visible in the background, creating a textured and layered appearance. The lighting is bright, highlighting the intricate details of the reef.

# THREE EXCURSIONS YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE IN THE MALDIVES

by Maria Eleonora Fiorini



Most resorts in the Maldives offer their guests a great variety of excursions which allow them to experience even more of these gorgeous islands.

Over the years I've been traveling to the Maldives, I've been lucky enough to try all kinds of excursions available. With my experiences in mind, here are my recommendations for the top three excursions everyone should go on while in the Maldives:



#### **DAY TRIP TO A DESERTED ISLAND (BEST PICK FOR THE ROMANTIC COUPLE!)**

The Maldives is made up of around 1,190 coral islands which are grouped into a double chain of 26 atolls. The islands are spread out over 90,000 sq km, which makes the Maldives one of the most disparate countries in the world – the perfect place for a desert island escape! The experience is breathtaking. Make sure you bring your camera because this once-in-a-lifetime excursion will be one you'll want to capture.

I remember the first time I ever visited a deserted island in the Maldives. The island itself was a tiny sandbank with very little vegetation and an amazing population of crabs that called the island their home. The island was so small that I could literally see it all in a few seconds by just turning around on the spot, but this only added to its charm. The feeling of being the only person on a tiny island, enveloped by deep blue waters was incredibly inspiring.

If the deserted island you visit has a house reef, you'll have the chance to do some snorkelling while you're there, so bring your snorkelling gear. Whatever you decide to do, remember to clean up after yourself and respect the delicate coral reefs. You know what they say: take only memories and leave nothing but footprints!



## DOLPHIN OR WHALE SHARK SPOTTING

The Maldives is one of the best places in the world for spotting whale sharks and dolphins, so don't miss this incredible opportunity. You'll start your safari by catching a boat that will take you far out into the ocean to the spots loved by the playful creatures.

The dolphins normally stick together in large groups (known as pods) of up to 12 individuals. Each pod is made up of a mixture of male, female and during the right season, baby dolphins.

If you're very lucky, the dolphins will be feeling even more inquisitive than normal on the day you're visiting and will play alongside the boat, swimming and jumping in the waves.

Although the idea of swimming with sharks might sound scary, I wholeheartedly recommend it. Whale sharks are known for being extremely gentle creatures that move in a slow, peaceful way.

When swimming with them, please be very respectful, just like you do with everything in nature. It's very important that you never try to touch them as they're easily scared and will swim away if they sense danger.







### SNORKELLING TOUR

Whether you go on a snorkelling tour around the house reef of your resort or travel out to a reef by boat, all the coral reefs in the Maldives are spectacular, so it really doesn't matter which one you choose.

A snorkelling excursion is a very popular choice on offer in the Maldives and organisers always put the safety of the snorkelers first. Each tour begins with a safety briefing and all the snorkelling equipment is checked regularly to make sure it's in full working order and safe to use.

The very first time I ever snorkelled on a coral reef was during my honeymoon in 2007 in the Maldives. My husband got in the water before me, jumped up and excitedly shouted, "It's like being in an aquarium!" When I donned my own mask and ducked my head under, I could instantly see that he was right. The schools of tropical fish and the brightly coloured coral reef really did look like a manmade aquarium, but everything that was laid out in front of us was 100% real.



### EXTRA TIP: VISIT A LOCAL INHABITED ISLAND

When I began writing this article, I was only planning on sharing my top three must-do excursions in the Maldives. But paying a visit to a local inhabited island was such an incredible experience for me that I simply couldn't write this article without including it.

Spending some time with the locals is a fascinating way to look beyond the tourism that's spread across the Maldives and catch a glimpse of what real Maldivian life is like. For centuries, the local people had been entirely self-sufficient, living exclusively off the natural resources they had access to, like bananas, coconuts and fish.

Even though they aren't so restricted any more, Maldivians still choose to live in a very environmentally-friendly way. They fish just the right amount for what they need and no more and instead of giant supermarket chains they have small outlets run by local families.

In the modern times in which we live, it's really refreshing to see people live in such a simple way and be so fulfilled while doing it... it really is possible to be happy with the simple things in life.



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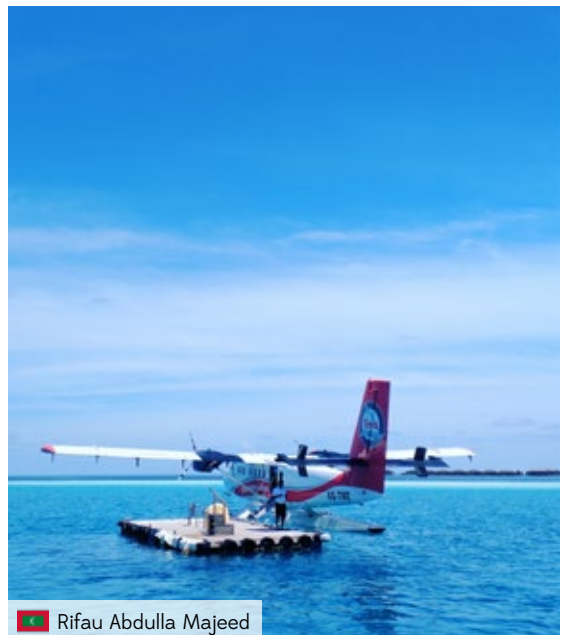
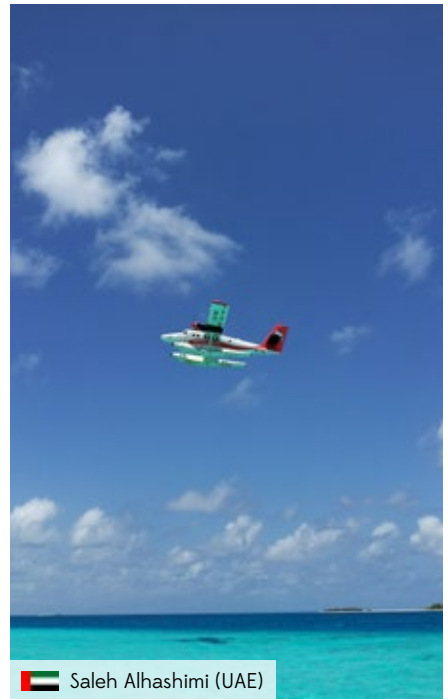
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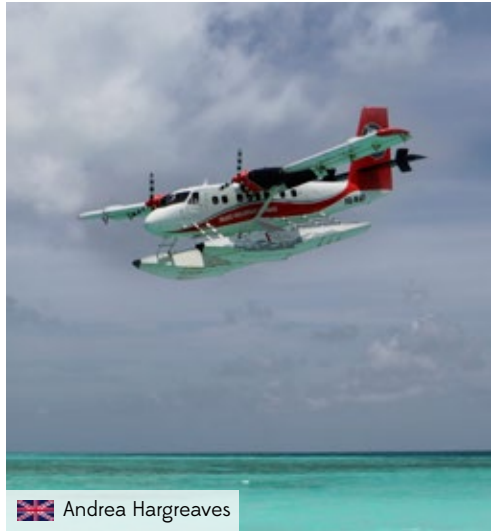
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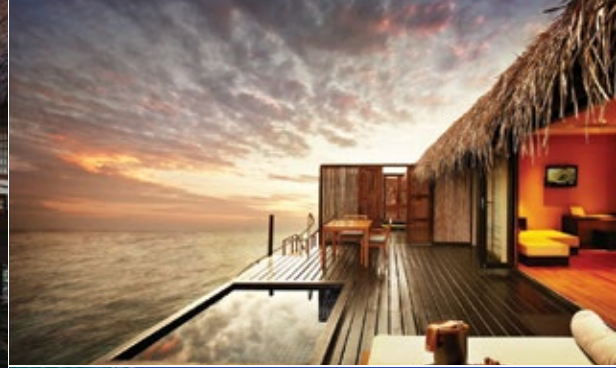
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De Havilland has a history of more than 80 years; the first de Havilland Canada flew in 1925, piloted by none other than Geoffrey de Havilland. The aircraft was called the 'Moth' and was quickly followed by many variations – all of them highly successful.

Development of the Twin Otter began in 1964, with the first flight on May 20, 1965 as a twin-engine replacement for the single-engine Otter had been planned by de Havilland Canada. Twin engines not only provided improved safety but also allowed for an increase in payload while retaining the renowned short take-off and landing (STOL) qualities. Design features included double slotted trailing edge

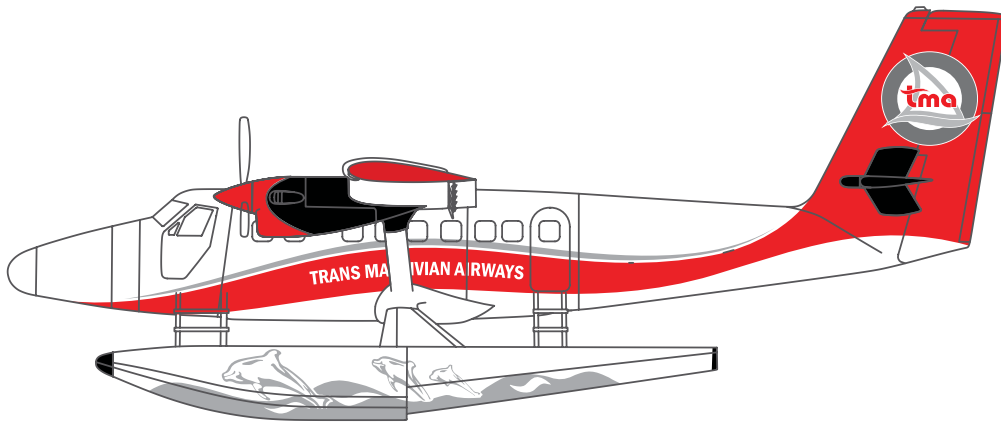
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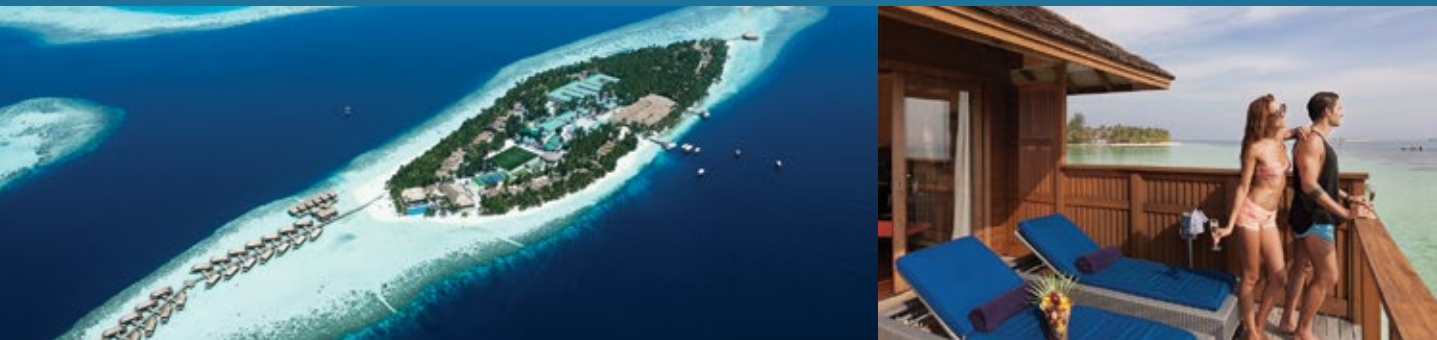
PASSANGER CAPACITY

	NUMBER OF SEAPLANES	PASSANGER CAPACITY
VIP Configuration Air-Conditioned Aircraft	1	8
VIP Configuration Aircraft (9-seat)	1	9
VIP Configuration Aircraft (10-seat)	1	10
DHC-6 Twin Otter 400 Series	3	15
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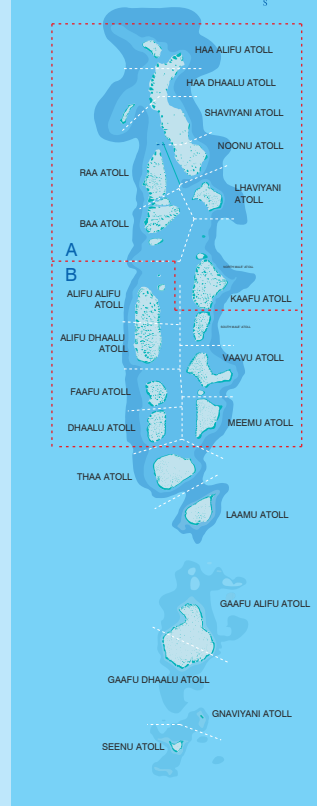
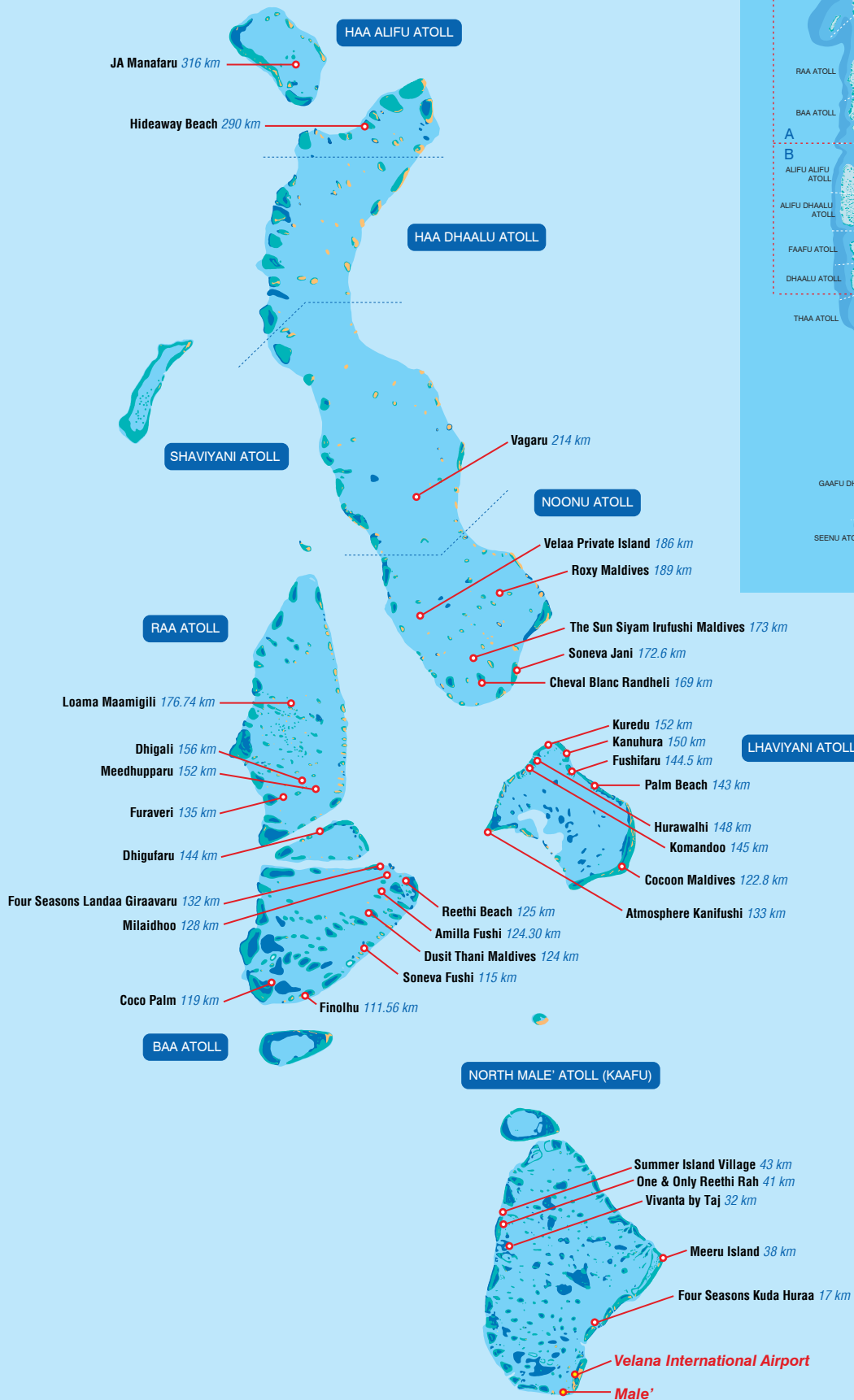
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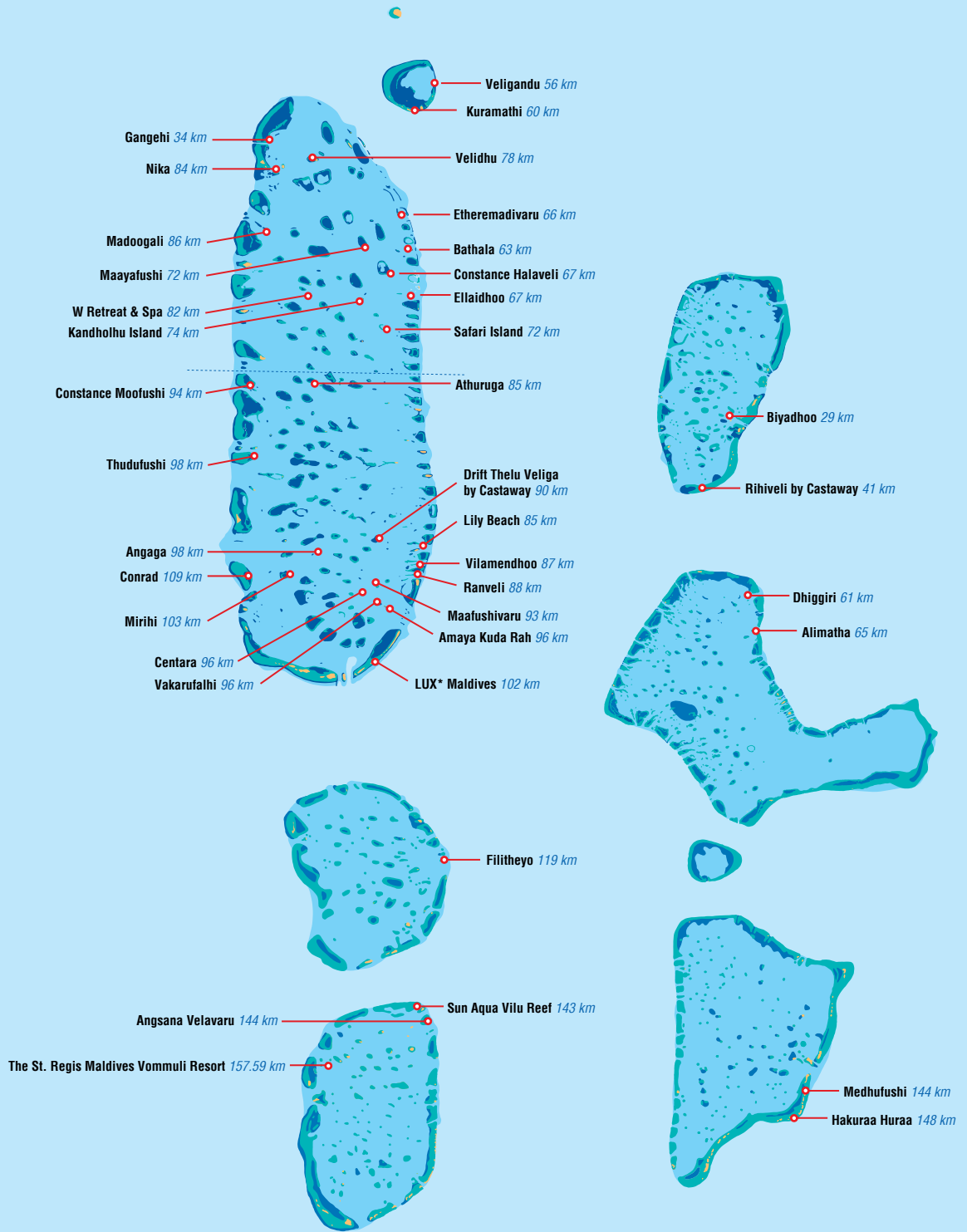




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**LEGEND**

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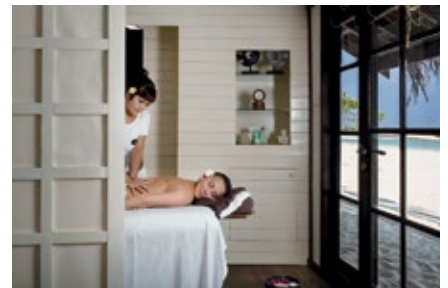
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Cocoon blends the best of Italian design with the Maldives' stunning natural beauty, all set against the backdrop of the azure Indian Ocean. Cocoon's interiors are exclusively designed by Lago, one of Italy's finest design companies. This 5-star, family-friendly, stylish resort, based on the principle of 'affordable luxury', is the perfect destination from which to discover the Maldives, whether you are honeymooning, scuba diving, or just looking for a place to unwind and relax. Inspired by the concept of lightness, Cocoon aims to regenerate the spirit and soothe the mind. Everything has been carefully planned to create a perfect atmosphere of harmony and tranquillity. The resort offers guests both privacy and a place to socialize if they wish, in the island's clubs, restaurants and bars. Cocoon's 'community table' is a place where people from all over the world sit together to break bread and cultural barriers.

• Maldives • DesignHotel • EscapeWinter • Luxury • Lightness • Lagoon • Turquoise

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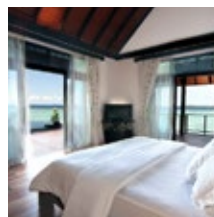
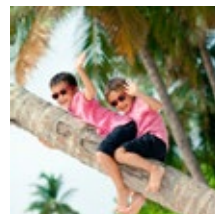
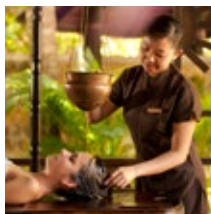


*The* SUN SIYAM  
IRU FUSHI  
MALDIVES

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- House reef with colorful corals and fishes
- Ideal for couples and families and why not, even the singles!
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