



TRANS MALDIVIAN AIRWAYS MAGAZINE

8Q-MBH

From Lockdown to Leading Destination TMA's Move to the New Seaplane Terminal TMA's Brand New VIP Lounge Sustainable Encounters with Sea Turtles The Dream Seaplane Excursion

Celebrating 50 Years of Unparallaled Tourism & Hospitality Excellence in the Maldives

It has been a great pleasure to witness the growth of Maldives into the World's Leading Destination and play a part in the expansion of the industry over the years.

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Contributors



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Zeek Ashraf is a writer and editor from the Maldives with a passion for literature, culture and travel. She likes to do the latter as often as she can, preferably to remote locations. Zeek is also the cofounder of an independent media and arts platform, Korali Collective.



Barbara Tori

Barbara Tori is a copywriter and web editor at Thedconcept. When she's not crafting persuasive, takeme-there content to help market Maldives' resorts, she likes to return to her beloved Lhaviyani Atoll where she was working for three years



Island Skies Special Edition

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Editor's Note



Welcome to Maldives and welcome once again, to the unique experience of flying over the magical Maldives.

We are excited to welcome you back to Island Skies after a break of almost two years. Although our flights have been operational since the country's reopening in July 2020, the publication has been on hold as one of the safety measures of TMA. As always, we have got some great articles for our readers on this issue of Island Skies.

In early 2020, the Maldives went into lockdown just like most other countries, however we were the first country to open the borders, just 110 days after it was closed. In our cover feature "From Lockdown to Leading Destination" Island Skies spoke with the Managing Director of the Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation, on how Maldives went from lockdown in March 2020 to winning the World's Leading Destination Award in December of the year and once again in 2021.

In July 2022, TMAs operations at Velana International Airport has been moved to a brand new seaplane terminal, from one that has been home to TMA for the last thirty years. Island Skies spoke with Mr. A.U.M Fawzy, the CEO of TMA on how the change was made seamlessly overnight, and how he expects the change would enhance the experience of passengers and the unique operations of TMA, the world's largest seaplane operator. In this issue of Island Skies, we are also delighted to present some of the key features of the new seaplane terminal along with the milestones TMA has achieved over the last 30 years.

The Maldives is home to five of the seven species of sea turtles. Our article "Under Pressure – The Maldives' turtles are endangered -but you can help" offers an introduction on the world's toughest survivors, how interesting their life journey is, threats, and guidelines on how to act responsibly around them and how the Olive Ridley Project is working to protect them and their habitat.

In our regular feature "Beyond Sun Sea and Sand" we offer a profile of the Maldives for you to browse through, as you glide high above the reefs, seas and islands of this unique country, offering a glimpse of its culture, geography, environment and its people.

Have an enjoyable stay in the island destination of your choice.

Adheel Ismail Editor



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Welcome On Board



We are delighted to welcome you aboard Trans Maldivian Airways, your gateway to paradise!

On behalf of the entire team of Trans Maldivian Airways, I would like to thank you for choosing us to start your dream vacation in the island nation best known as heaven on earth.

We started our seaplane journey in 1993 with two aircraft to provide a transfer solution to tourists visiting the country. On our first flight, we transferred four guests and this year

we expect to transfer close to a million guests to more than 80 dream resorts while also taking delivery of our 60th aircraft! We are incredibly humbled to have been able to showcase this beautiful and stunning country to more than 5 million guests who have traveled with us over the last three decades!

Our journey to becoming the most preferred airline over the years in the Maldives has also led us to becoming the nation's pride as we maintain the title of the World's Largest Seaplane Operator. We are beyond grateful and proud to have contributed to the industry infrastructure to make the island nation a world-renowned bucket list destination. This year is an exciting year for the Maldives as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Maldives Tourism. The tiny island nation with white sandy beaches, crystal clear turquoise waters and exquisite underwater beauty has been a fascinating destination since the start of Maldives tourism in 1972.

Today, as we celebrate this wonderful milestone in the country, we consider ourselves fortunate to have bounced back from the pandemic which brought the world to a halt. From transferring over 3000 passengers daily to almost zero, in just a matter of few months, the Coronavirus pandemic had left us all wondering when we will fly next. It was extremely tough to halt operations and be in a situation where no one could predict how the world would re-open. There were multiple reports predicting a hefty impact on the tourism and aviation sectors across the globe. Being at the cusp of both these sectors, TMA stared down the barrel. However, Maldives became one of the first countries to open its borders to tourists in July 2020 with an astounding effort from the government with maximum attention to safety protocols. We were nimble and hence quickly adopted the new safety and health mandates. Post the border opening, tourism started to gradually get back on its feet and TMA can be credited for being there when the inbound tourist arrivals were steadily ramping up.

As we gear up to serve you after the pandemic, we are elated to welcome you to a brand-new seaplane terminal with enhanced facilities to ensure maximum comfort throughout your journey with us. Leaving the 30-year-old base and relocating with the largest seaplane fleet in the world has been an event which we are proud to have accomplished seamlessly while still serving our guests.

We are excited to bring you this special edition of Island Skies, celebrating the 50th year of Maldives Tourism, as we share with you a glimpse of our contribution to the Maldives Tourism over the years along with an introduction to the new world-class seaplane terminal. 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. We also wish to have the opportunity to serve you again in the future.

Have an enjoyable flight and a fantastic stay in the Maldives!

A.U.M. Fawzy Chief Executive Officer



Built to blend in perfect harmony with the surrounding environment and with a direct focus on energy efficiency and environment preservation, **Emerald Maldives Resort & Spa**, has established itself as prime destination in the Maldives.

Located in the Raa Atoll, this 5-star Deluxe All-Inclusive Resort combines modern design with the beauty of "Natural Elegance" over its **120 villas**, of which **60 beach villas** and **60 overwater villas**.



Redefining Luxury with the beauty of Matural Elegance



Now Open!

The New Maldives Soulful Gem



Located in the Raa Atoll, **Emerald Faarufushi Resort & Spa** is the new 5-star Deluxe All-Inclusive of The Emerald Collection,

Designed with the discerning traveler in mind, the Resort stands out for its minimalist but modern architecture and meticulously refined services, creating an enchanting atmosphere of **Barefoot Elegance**.

The island boasts **80 luxurious villas**, split into six different categories of which **38 beach villas** and **42 overwater villas** and features the Dolphin Kids Club, a Gym & Sports Center, with 1 tennis court, 1 padel court on the Marina's Jetty, plus a Water Sports Center, a 5-star PADI Diving Center and The Emerald SPA with Balinese and Thai traditional treatments.



Maldives Beyond Sun, Sand & Sea

GEOGRAPHY

The Maldives consists of approximately 1,190 coral islands grouped in a double chain of 26 atolls, spread over roughly 90,000 square kilometres, making the country a unique destination in the world. The islands stretch from north to south over a length of 871 km across the equator. Just 188 islands are inhabited, over 160 islands are tourist resorts currently in operation. Some of the other islands are used for agriculture and industry, while many remain in their pristine natural state.

CLIMATE

The temperature of Maldives ranges between 24oC and 33oC 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 26oC. Weather is dominated by two seasons, the northeast monsoon from November to April which brings in clear blue skies and long periods of dry weather, and the southwest monsoon from May to October which brings in rain during intermittent periods of the season.

COUNTRY DIALLING CODE: +960 ELECTRICITY:

240 Volts AC

LOCAL TIME: +5 GMT

ENVIRONMENT & CONSERVATION

The coral reef systems of the Maldives are the seventh largest in the world covering an area of approximately 4500 square kilometres and is home to 258 species of hard and soft coral and 1,100 species of fish. The islands are also home to an abundance of unique terrestrial fauna and flora. Approximately 12% of the islands have mangroves which play an important role in the island ecosystem. In terms of conservation and protection, the country has declared 73 marine and terrestrial protected areas covering over 600 square kilometres. Three atoll of the Maldives, Baa Atoll, Addu Atoll and Fuamulah are UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. Several marine and terrestrial species are protected by law.

POPULATION

The population of Maldives has increased rapidly during the last few decades. However, with a resident population of approximately 550,000, the country remains one of the smallest independent nations in the world. Maldives boasts one of the highest literacy rates in the world with a 98% being able to read and write and universal primary education achieved two decades ago in 2002. Educational standards are among the highest in the region and schools generally follow the British system of education.

The coral reef systems of the Maldives are the seventh largest in the world







HISTORY

Archaeological 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 time of the first settlers who were from various parts of the world travelling the seas during 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 traditions, craft and cuisine reflect East Asian and South Asian characteristics and traits. The Maldives has been a melting pot of different cultures as people from different parts of the world came here and settled down

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 script, currently used by Maldivians, Thaana was introduced in the late 16th 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, Russian, Japanese Italian, and Chinese.

CAPITAL

Male', with a total area of 5.8 square kms, is the capital of the country and is part of the Greater Male' Region that consists of Hulhumale',

Male' and the neighbouring island of Vilingili. It is the centre of government administration and the hub of trade and commerce and is home to more than 40% of the population. Velana International Airport is located in the Greater Male' Region.

ECONOMY

While tourism contributes more than a quarter of the national income and a greater proportion of national employment, fishing is a primary economic activity in nearly all inhabited islands, the largest source of employment in local communities and the main physical export of the country. More than 20% of the labour force of the Maldives is employed in the fisheries sector and fishing remains an important livelihood activity for a large number of Maldivians. Tuna fishery of the Maldives is one of the most sustainable in the world, as all tuna harvested in the country is caught using handline or pole and line, ensuring maximum sustainable yields with zero bycatch.

CURRENCY

The local currency is Rufiyaa. At the time of publication, the official exchange rate is 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 in US Dollar, Euro or most other European currencies. 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, although international credit cards are widely accepted in major outlets in the islands as well.

HEALTH

The Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Male', and Hulhumale' Hospital are state-run hospitals located in the Greater Male' Region. Medical services are provided across the country through a network of regional hospitals in key population centres, and health centres located in each inhabited island. ADK Hospital in Male' and Tree Top Hospital located in the Male' Region are the largest private hospitals in the country. Several private clinics in Male' and the rest of the islands are also an important part of the healthcare infrastructure. Resorts have their own clinics and resident doctors, 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

Mobile telephone services in the country are offered by Dhiraagu and Ooredoo Maldives, with networks covering the whole country. Both companies have roaming agreements with various operators across the globe. All resorts in Maldives offer Internet Services.







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From Lockdown to Leading Destination

In 2020, while the world was in lockdown, the Maldives was getting ready to welcome visitors in a post lockdown world. If isolation was the key ingredient, the country has it in abundance. Tourist can feel safe and enjoy without risk, in any of its idyllic islands, removed from population centers such as those in the rest of the world. With health and safety measures in place at airports, tourist transfer vessels and at all tourist facilities, the country was ready.

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Destination Marketing During the Pandemic

In 2020, while the world was in lockdown, Maldives was getting ready to welcome visitors in a post lockdown world. If isolation was the key ingredient, the country has it in abundance. Tourist can feel safe and enjoy without risk, in any of its idyllic islands, removed from population centers such as those in the rest of the world. With health and safety measures in place at airports, transfer vessels and at all tourist facilities, the country was ready.

In mid-July 2020, Maldives opened its borders for all international tourists. More than half a million tourists visited the Maldives by the end of the year seizing the opportunity to enjoy the freedom that the destination offered. We celebrated the end of the most challenging year in the history of global tourism as the Leading Destination of the World and went on to win the title in 2021 as well.

So how did the Maldives go from lockdown to leading destination?

With the backdrop of a record 1.7 million arrivals in 2019, Maldives welcomed 2020 with ambitions to reach a new milestone, two million arrivals by the end of the year. The Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation had an intensive program of global marketing campaigns lined up for the year. "Our team was motivated and geared to achieve our goal" said Thoyyib Mohamed, Managing Director of MMPRC entrusted with the task of maintaining the Maldives brand in the top of the minds of travelers around the world.

The country's key source markets were looking good, the Indian market surpassed all expectations, and traditional Europe markets were once again showing consistent annual growth after several years. And despite the disturbing news of a rapidly spreading virus in China, the country ended January 2020 with a 14% increase in arrivals compared to the year before.

As early as January, the Maldives government started taking its first steps to mitigate a potential health crisis in the country. A National Coronavirus Task Force was constituted by the President to oversee aspects relating to the protection and mitigation effort. While this was going on, borders around the world were being closed and restrictions on international travel were being imposed in various regions. For Maldives, highly dependent on tourism for its income and employment, this was alarming.

By the end of January direct flights from China, Maldives' top source market in 2019, were suspended. The news from Italy, another of our key markets, was not good. As the virus spread, restrictions were imposed on arrivals from affected regions in Europe and Asia.

restriction Alona with the in movement around the world. international tourism fairs were cancelled, roadshows in various cities had to be suspended, outdoor marketing campaigns came to halt, and so did all of the other activities that required travel and movement.

The first cases of the virus were detected in the Maldives in early March. By the end of the month, Maldives closed its borders for international travel, and so were the borders of almost all the countries in the world. International travel has come to a halt and global tourism was in shut down.

"Although we had no idea how long the world will be in lockdown, we made a conscious decision to maintain the intensity of our global marketing and PR efforts with whatever changes that may be required to suit the situation.

For us there was no alternative, we had to be ready for resumption of travel however long it may take". Thoyyib explained, talking about MMPRC's direction in the early days of the pandemic. "We re-strategized to suit the situation".

During the early days of the pandemic MMPRC's objective was to maintain brand presence and sustain the unique position the Maldives brand has achieved over the years. MMPRC began its 'visit later' campaign like many other countries in the world with the objective of keeping Maldives in people's minds and offered content on various social media platforms for people to see and dream about the Maldives. Within days MMPRC's campaigns were online with staff working from home.

MMPRC's virtual platforms were buzzing with activity during the 110 days the Maldives was in lockdown. The 'Visit Later' campaign brought Maldives to the homes of those in lockdown around the world. Live events on various platforms were viewed by thousands in various countries across the globe. On top of MMPRC's team was busy meeting with local and international

stakeholders of the industry, to get an understanding of the situation, and plot the way forward in a postpandemic world.

Will borders be opened in some countries while others are still closed? Will the travel corridors become a reality? Will borders suddenly be closed due to outbreaks? "We devised marketing strategies, activities, and messaging, to suit various scenarios in consideration of various expert views on the possible course of the pandemic, and possible patterns of travel that may emerge". Thoyyib explained.



Photo: Ishan @seefromthesky via Unsplash



At the same the government and public health authorities were working to establish safety protocols and measures to curb breakouts of infections in resorts and tourism facilities in preparation for the resumption of tourism, even though no one was sure when borders will be open.

Maldives opened its borders for international travelers just 110 days after it was closed. To be the first to do so, demonstrated a high level of confidence to the global travel market. At the same time, the country became the first destination to give an opportunity for hundreds of thousands of people around the world, eager to escape the stress of being under lockdown.

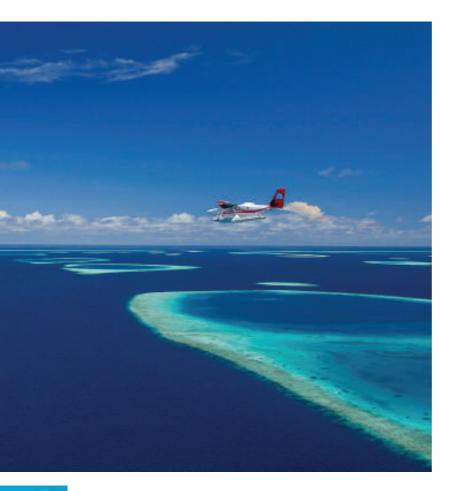
With that MMPRC launched its 'Rediscover Maldives' campaign, inviting people around the world to relive the happiness and to rejoice in the sun. This was followed through, with their 'safe haven' messaging capitalizing on the Maldives' key USP of one-island-one-resort, that offered a contained, safe environment for holiday makers.

The response was immediate. By the end of the year over 555,000 visitors from around the world arrived here to enjoy the freedom the islands offered in a world of sporadic and ongoing restrictions and lockdowns. And that too despite the testing required at home and the possibility of having to quarantine when they return. During the early days, visitors were from countries which had borders open for their citizens to travel abroad. Countries as far as USA and Brazil dominated arrivals during the early days after re-opening. So how did Maldives thrive during the last two years, while many destinations were still having trouble re-launching their travel and tourism sectors.

Thoyyib attributed the changes brought to destination marketing by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih during the last few years, as being instrumental in the country's remarkable recovery. "The President has not only supported destination marketing by tripling the annual marketing budget. He has also kept a close watch on our activities and the performance of the industry," he added.







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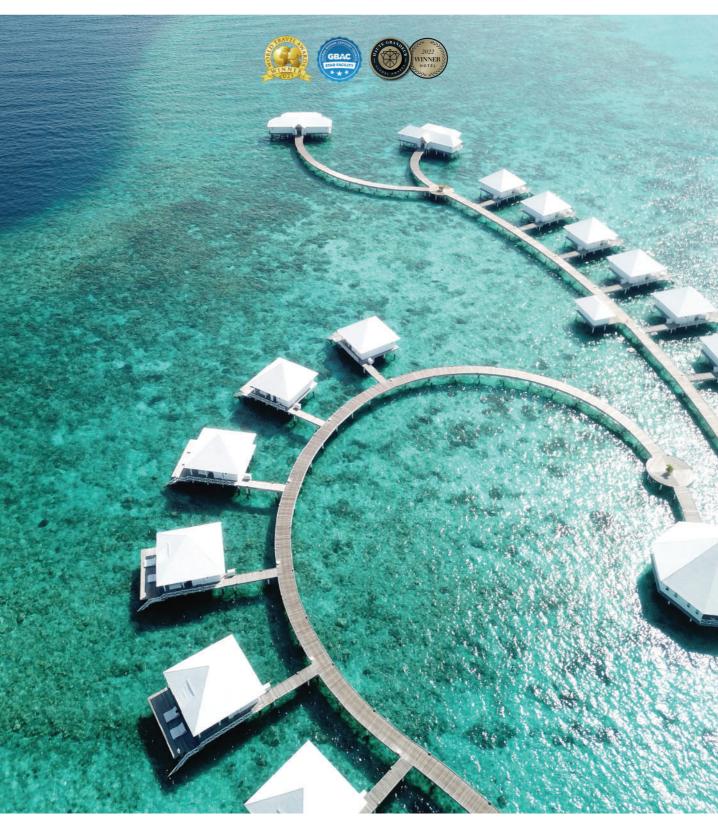
It was such a great honor and a reward for the whole industry to receive such an award at the end of the most challenging years we have seen during the fifty-year history of the industry. We have tremendous unity in the industry to work together to reach our goals. "When we look back at what we have done during the last two years, we see that our shift to online platforms has helped us connect with the travelling populations at a more personal level. The social media campaigns we conduct are not just aimed at providing information, we engage our customers through competitions and conversation. Through continuous interactions with various players and stakeholders around the world we have established strong networks and connections with the travel trade around the world," Thoyyib explained.

According to Thoyyib, one of our most effective strategies utilized during the time was to localize destination advertising and promotions in various markets. Now it has become the norm to use local language in marketing communications in source markets around the world. "With that travelers feel a greater sense of affinity with the Maldives. We now have local PR representatives in 14 different source markets around the world. Our teams are in touch with them daily. Through them we are able to get primary data directly from the ground and make quick decisions based on the information we receive".

Summing up the last two years Thoyyib said, "It was such a great honor and a reward for the whole industry to receive such an award at the end of the most challenging years we have seen during the fifty-year history of the industry. We have tremendous unity in the industry to work together to reach our goals. The efforts we made as a nation and as an industry reaped its rewards. And as a nation we are thankful to those who kept Maldives in their hearts and minds during those challenging times".







Diamonds Athuruga and Diamonds Thudufushi are contemporary all-inclusive resorts offering culinary excellence, exciting water sports and diving activities, a relaxing spa and spacious beach front accommodation . The renowned house reefs and turquoise lagoons ensure a truly unique and memorable holiday experience.

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Autken Spence Hotels

Under Pressure The Maldives' turtles are endangered — but you can help

By Barbara Tori

The Maldivian waters are home to five species of sea turtles, with hawksbills and green turtles comprising the majority of the popula on. With photographic identification of the unique patterns of scales on the animal's face, the Olive Ridley Project organisation has identified a total of 5,251 individuals of these in the Maldives. This holiday, seize the opportunity to swim with the islands' iconic sea turtles in their natural environment, but promise us to also learn why our residents are so special and how you can reduce human pressure put on them.

WORLD'S TOUGHEST SURVIVORS

The Maldives' diverse coral reef ecosystem - the seventh largest reef system in the world and the largest in the Indian Ocean - is home to the much-admired sea turtles that can commonly be observed resting in reef crevices or feeding on seagrass in lagoons.

You will be left in awe when you spot your first one!

You may have added snorkelling or scuba diving with sea turtles to your bucket list for their majestic looks and gentle character, but the tourists' and researchers' intrigue by them extends beyond the appearance.

For starters, did you know sea turtles have roamed our planet for about 110 million years and survived where many other species have fallen. To put things into perspective, they are living relics from the era of dinosaurs! They are master navigators too, which enables them to migrate considerable distances between specific feeding areas and nesting beaches.

But despite their being well adapted to life in the water, their struggle is s ll real.

HELLO, WORLD

A sea turtle's fight for survival begins the day they break out of the egg. Tiny, clumsy hatchlings (there can be up to 125 eggs in a clutch!) dig up the sand of their nests and make their way from the beach toward the ocean. They can become disoriented by artificial light, so the most aware islands and resorts dim the area around the nest and have staff keep an eye on any hatchlings heading inland rather than to the sea. When not protected, the baby turtles - only about 5 centimetres in size - can fall prey to predators like birds, crabs and lizards.

Those that make it to the ocean can fall victim to their many natural predators, such as sharks, groupers, barracudas and dolphins. In the Sea turtles have roamed our planet for about 110 million years. To put things into perspective, they are living relics from the era of dinosaurs!



ocean, they spend the first months hidingand feeding; the faster they grow, the fewer challenges they will face.

Green sea turtles, for instance, only reach adulthood between 15 and 50 years of age and and just 1 in 1000 hatchlings will make it to there. What's more, mature females return to their nes ng beaches just once every 2-4 years to nest, so reducing the human impact is truly essential if we want them to survive as a species.

THE HUMAN IMPACT

While the aforemen oned natural obstacles faced by sea turtles are inevitable, it is the increasing pressure by humans that makes their plight tragic.

What threatens their future survival are poaching, fishing nets, ghost nets and vessel strikes.

Their feeding and nesting habitats are being destroyed and the pollu on of the world's oceans is rapidly worsening. Last but not least, their populations have been drastically reduced due to increased demand for turtle meat, eggs, skin and shells.

Sadly, hawksbill sea turtles have even been classified as critically endangered and greens as endangered in the Maldives. While evolved to adapt to change, the pressure on sea turtles over the past 100 years has been so immense that populations have plummeted, with some declining up to 95%!



ORP currently has sea turtle biologists and veterinarians opera ng in 6 of the 26 atolls: Baa, Laamu, Lhaviyani, Noonu, North Malé and Raa. They also operate two facilities for sea turtles rescue and rehabilitation: the veterinary-run Marine Turtle Rescue Centre in Baa Atoll and the Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Centre in North Malé Atoll . Since opening, a total of 164 turtle patients have been admi ed, with currently 7 being in care. It is the olive ridley species that makes up the majority of the admitted patients as they seem to be the most susceptible to entanglement. The average length of hospitalisa on is 107 days.

ORP's activities extend well beyond fieldwork though: they were invited to become members of the Marine Reptile Working Group in the Maldives, tasked with developing the Maldives' Red List for sea turtles; ORP also provided technical expertise into the development of marine protected areas, to name but a few significant involvements in the area.

It's not all fun and games in paradise, but fortunately, Olive Ridley Project charity organisation has been going to great lengths to ensure sea turtles remain in the Maldives for generations to come.

OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT - on a mission to protect sea turtles and their habitat Through rescue, rehabilita on, scientific research and education, ORP has been a key stakeholder in the conserva on of sea turtles and their habitats in the Maldives since 2013, subsequently expanding their reach to Pakistan, Oman, Kenya and Seychelles. In the Maldives, where their involvement is most comprehensive, their team of turtle biologists, veterinarians and conservationists uses their knowledge to safeguard turtle populations.



Registered Charity in the UK #1165905

Love turtles? Help them survive!

A major challenge when attempting to protect sea turtles in the Maldives is that there is a significant lack of data on sea turtle abundance and distribution in the area, so ORP capitalises on citizen science to increase the observer coverage and data collection nationwide. In other words, you too can put your researcher cap on and be a part of the solution.



Adopt a turtle. Pick your favourite turtle pa ent from the database, pick a name, make a donation and you will receive a certificate of adoption as well as updates on how the recovery is going.

Photo-document your sea turtle sightings and submit the material to ORP for analysis. Ask your island's dive centre or hotel to provide guidance on how to capture research-suitable shots. With the help of citizen science (locals, tourists and volunteers), ORP recorded 454 new individual sea turtles in the Maldives. With tourism now resumed after the pandemic, we hope for submissions to increase, resulting in even more insights into the turtles' distribution and numbers in the country.

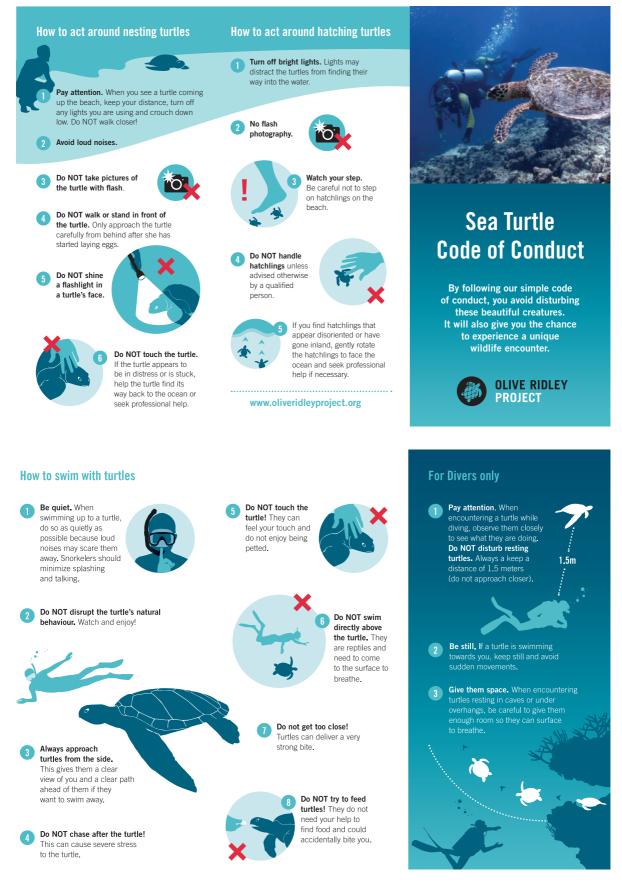
Learn about marine life and share your knowledge and firsthand experience with friends and family. The ORP website https:// oliveridleyproject.org/ is packed full of resources, including e-learning courses, book recommendations, facts, reports and more.





The author would like to thank Dr. Martin Stelfox, CEO and Founder of Olive Ridley Project, and his team for providing input.

Follow ORP's simple code of conduct that allows you to avoid disturbing these beautiful creatures and give you the chance to experience a unique wildlife encounter while at it!



The Story of TMA



The Maldivians undertook voluntary work in order to build their own airport and in 1966 Malé saw the first commercial landing.

The few adventurous travellers who came to the Maldives in the following years were limited to exploring the pristine islands close to Malé. The natural and untouched beauty of the islands started to appeal an increasing number of inquisitive travellers, and the first resorts opened in 1972, all within reach of a boat from Male.

Maldivian Air Taxi & Trans Maldivian Airways

The beginnings of commercial aviation in the Maldives are to be undoubtedly attributed to Trans Maldivian Airways. TMA started in 1989 as a company operating a helicopter fleet under the name Hummingbird Island Helicopters. However the destination was struggling with infrastructure problems relating to the established helicopter air service, and the many resorts were still only reachable by boat, the idea of faster and more convenient travel was about to be floated.

Traveling to Kuredu in 1991, Lars Erik Nielsen, recalls 'The passengers were so sick on the voyage, I had to find a better way to travel!' And he did. With his love of seaplanes and the much needed Scandinavian entrepreneurship, he started Maldivian Air Taxi in 1993.

From its humble beginnings in 1993 with only two aircraft, the company grew rapidly over the years where over 500,000 passengers were transferred per year. With the succession of seaplane operation in the country, Hummingbird Island Helicopters later changed the name to Hummingbird Island Airways, and the first seaplane was added to the fleet in 1997. The transition to a seaplane-only fleet was completed in 1999 and another year later, the name was changed to Trans Maldivian Airways.

In February 2013 Maldivian Air Taxi (MAT) and Trans Maldivian Airways (TMA) merged into one airline and adoptted the name Trans Maldivian Airways Pvt Ltd.

Since its inception in 1989 Trans Maldivian Airways represents a synonym for connecting the Maldives islands. It is the oldest air services operator in the Maldives and has grown to become the largest seaplane operator in the world.

The Dream Seaplane Excursion: Snorkelling with Gentle Giants in South Ari Atoll

By Zeek Ashraf

Globally renowned for its idyllic resorts and upscale properties, the Maldives is considered the pinnacle of far-flung luxury destinations. But for intrepid explorers seeking thrill beyond the norm, what better way to spend the day than on a seaplane excursion to a remote desert island? A day trip or half-day excursion with Trans Maldivian Airways can whisk you away to secluded shores, where you can snorkel, have a picnic, and bask in the pristine beauty that only the Maldives can offer.

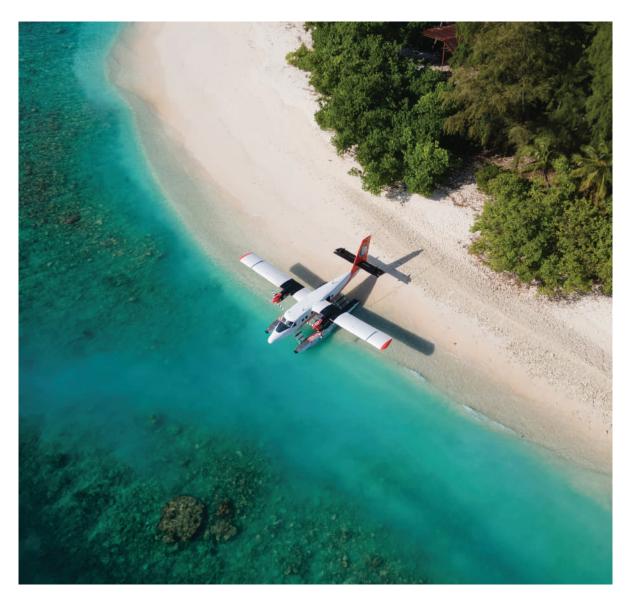
MALDIVIAN AIR

There are hundreds of uninhabited islands to choose from for your excursion, out of the twenty-six natural atolls that make up the archipelago. For a half-day snorkel trip, my friends and I decided on an island called Ariyadhoo, situated in one of the most famed regions in the world for whale shark encounters — South Ari Atoll. While sightings are excellent year-round, the months from August to November are the peak season for swimming with these gentle giants.

The Trans Maldivian experience began the moment we arrived at Velana International Airport. Ours was the first flight of the morning, which meant we had to check in well before dawn. When we got to the new seaplane terminal, which had only recently begun operations, we were ushered to the TMA Coral Lounge on the second floor. Chic, tasteful, and quietly sophisticated, it was the ideal setting to unwind before our flight. Grabbing a plateful of sweet pastries and a steaming double espresso, I settled down and made myself comfortable.

The interior of the TMA Coral Lounge was sleek and modern; a palette of creamy, monochromatic beige with vibrant pops of red to give it some personality. In an adjoining space were rows of recliners and massage chairs, perfect for weary travellers in need of a quick pamper session. For a breath of fresh air, the lounge also featured an expansive outdoor area overlooking the seaplane dock.

Soon enough, it was time to head to the gates. A friendly face scanned our boarding cards and promptly escorted us to our flight. Once aboard with our seatbelts buckled, there was nothing to do but sit back, relax, and take in the gorgeous sights. The short journey of thirty minutes afforded us incomparable bird's-eye views of the Maldives' unique topography – palm-fringed, bone-white isles scattered like glistening pearls across the deep blue Indian Ocean. No matter how many times I'd flown before, I couldn't help but marvel at the splendour of it all.







In just half an hour, we arrived at Ariyadhoo. The seaplane made a smooth landing, then anchored itself to shore so passengers could disembark before it took off. The island was green and lush, flanked by feathery trees and lapped by glassy warm water. The sea glittered in the mid-morning sun, and I could almost hear it call out to me. Teeming with a kaleidoscope of marine life and coral, this was an underwater utopia. But of course, there was one reason we chose South Ari Atoll and one reason alone. Whale sharks!

After a moreish picnic on the beach, we called for a dinghy to take us to the hotspot. There were other boats in the vicinity, filled with snorkellers just as eager as us. Ready with our masks and fins, there was a splash as we all jumped off. Fortune seemed to be in our favour that morning, for as soon as we entered the water, we were met with a shark nearly ten metres long. Its spotted tail swung slowly, almost rhythmically from side to side, before disappearing into the darkness. It marked the first time I had ever caught glimpse of this majestic yet elusive creature, a memory I will carry with me for a lifetime.

Eventually, as all good things do, our half-day trip came to an end. We packed our snorkel kits and hopped on a return flight from the closest TMA landing site, which happened to be a nearby resort in the very same atoll. From start to finish, this dreamy experience was one I could never bring myself to forget. Lovers of great adventure out there, trust me when I say this — a seaplane excursion with Trans Maldivian Airways should be on the top of your todo list.

And now it's got me thinking... Where to next?



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d A MEMBER OF DESIGN HOTELS



Interview with TMA's CEO, Mr. A.U.M Fawzy



On TMA's operation during the Covid-19 lockdown and the airline's recent move to the brand-new seaplane terminal at VIA.

Trans Maldivian Airways (TMA) is the largest seaplane operator in the world with almost 60 aircraft and an average of 300 daily movements to over 80 resorts the airline currently serves. With its first seaplane flight on 4th November 1993, the operation which commenced with just two aircraft has been instrumental in transforming the tourism landscape of the Maldives during the last three decades. During the same period, the hub of its operation, TMA's seaplane base established on the eastern side of Velana International Airport expanded from its simple beginnings to a sprawling complex spread over three buildings. This July, TMA has moved its operations to the new Noovilu Seaplane Terminal, a shared facility for multiple seaplane operators, including TMA. If you have experienced a magical flight over the islands on board TMA before, you would not have failed to notice the difference in your experience in boarding your flight today.

Island Skies met with Mr. A.U.M Fawzy, the CEO of TMA, who has seen through the growth of the airline over its thirty years, to talk about the new terminal, and how the seamless overnight change of such a complex operation was managed. Island Skies also used the opportunity to get an insight of the airline's operations during the Covid-19 lockdown.

We started our conversation on how TMA operated, when borders were closed in 2020.

IS: After the first cases of Covid-19 were detected in the Maldives in March 2020, the country's borders were closed, and the tourism industry came to a halt. Did you have to shut down your operations altogether? How did it impact your operations?

Mr. Fawzy: As an airline serving the tourism industry in Maldives, it impacted us a lot. Our regular flights to the resorts came to a halt. However, when international travel to Maldives was stopped, evacuation flights were organized by some countries. Others who were stranded in the Maldives due to their own borders being closed, had to travel to other resorts where they spent long periods before being able to fly home. So, we were operating evacuation flights for those who had to connect to their international flights and for those who had to move to other resorts during that time. On top of that, we continued to work on maintaining our fleet to ensure that we were ready to serve whenever business resumed.

IS: With a strict nationwide lockdown in place, how did you manage to organize staff for those activities? And what were the safety measures taken for the protection of staff?

Mr. Fawzy: I am proud of my team here at TMA. They are passionate about their work and the Company. We had approximately 60 to 70 staff, residing here throughout the lockdown who volunteered to stay in the seaplane base in isolation. In order to create a comfortable living space, we converted some of our lounges and other facilities. As you know we have our own electricity and water. We had cooks, cleaners, and other support staff, providing for those who were living here during the time. And we ensured their safety. We had strict rules in place so that they had no physical contact with those outside the base. Flight crew who operated the evacuation flights did not mix with the resident staff. We adhered to stringent standards of sanitization for all aircraft that were utilized. Our crew wore protective gear during the flights and passengers underwent PCR tests before they boarded. So, everyone was safe.





IS: Now that the operation is in full swing, has seaplane travel bounced back to its prepandemic level?

Mr. Fawzy: When borders reopened in mid-July 2020, there were obviously fewer tourist arrivals to the country. But gradually tourist arrivals began to pick up. Today we are doing much better than the pre-Covid passenger numbers. A lot of credit has to be given to the Government of Maldives for being pro-active throughout the pandemic. Their dynamism and support from all tourism industry stakeholders has resulted in Maldives performing extremely well during and after the pandemic.

IS: Let's shift our attention to the huge change that your operations have undergone with your move to the New Seaplane Terminal. You have been part of the growth of TMA, and you have seen the expansion of the TMA terminal over the last thirty years. What are your thoughts on the new seaplane terminal? And how would the move affect your operations?

Mr. Fawzy: If you compare the two facilities, you can see that the style of the new terminal is quite different from what we had before. This new terminal is modern and sleek, and it is aesthetically beautiful, while the other terminal had a more local theme with sand and wooden floors, thatched ceilings, and a more open view of the lagoon and the water aerodrome. We have seen the same change if we take the resorts of the past and present. In the past the resorts had a style which was very local. Now we have more modern designs, of course, with a lot of Maldivian character but with greater luxury, modern comforts and convenience. This new seaplane terminal is a beautiful building and I love it.

I would also like to add that in our old seaplane base, we were operating from three different buildings. Now we have everything under one roof, which will certainly offer a smoother passage for our customers, and at the same time this offers more synergies to gain a greater level of efficiency for our operations. I believe there is a lot of potential for us to do well here. I also believe this move was essential for future expansion of seaplane operations in the country. And as far as our operations are concerned, I believe that while infrastructure is an essential element of our operation, it is our great team which has been at the core of our success, and we will continue to see that no matter where our operations are based. Of course, there is a lot of sentimental value attached to our old seaplane base in which we have worked for so many years.



IS: With such a complex operation, it must have been a formidable challenge to move your operations overnight, without hindering your operations even for a single day.

Mr. Fawzy: When you look at it that way it seems like a massive challenge. However, I always believe no matter how big a task is, if you break it down into smaller tasks, each of those individual tasks would not pose such a big challenge. When you are focused and when you know exactly what you're doing, you can get it right. That is why we have been extremely successful in what we do. Our team has that experience. We have evolved to become the largest seaplane operator in the world. We began with two aircraft and in the early days, we operated from a container. Change is not new to us. It has been part of our daily lives over the last three decades. We have kept on changing and evolving during the whole lifetime of the airline. So, this was just another change, but it was of course a huge change. It was well planned, every department was aligned, everybody worked together, every possible issue that could crop up was forecasted and planned for. We analyzed the whole process meticulously, breaking down all tasks and going into all the details, hence we were able to pull this transition off very smoothly without any disruption to our operations.

> Every day we look at our operations and ask ourselves what we can do to improve our performance







IS: Before we conclude, we would like to use this opportunity to get a glimpse of your vision for the future of TMA. Mr. Fawzy: Our work continues. Every day we look at our operations and ask ourselves what we can do to improve our performance. Of course, our business relies on the tourism industry. If the industry is doing well, we do well too. There are a lot of new resorts coming up and many of them will open for operations in the next two to three years. We engage with the resorts at the very early stages of their development. Our philosophy is to provide all the support that resorts may need during their development phase and early stages of operation. In other words, we carry them when they are crawling, and when they are running, we ask them to take us along with them.

Our business model has remained the same over the years and we will continue to strengthen that model. Since our inception we have remained a responsible partner of the tourism industry. Our presence gave the industry confidence to expand to the outer atolls. For the last three decades we have ensured that we are adequately resourced to serve the industry as it expands. We will ensure we continue to do so in the future as well.



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Arthen Spence Hotels

Farewell to TMA's Old Seaplane Base

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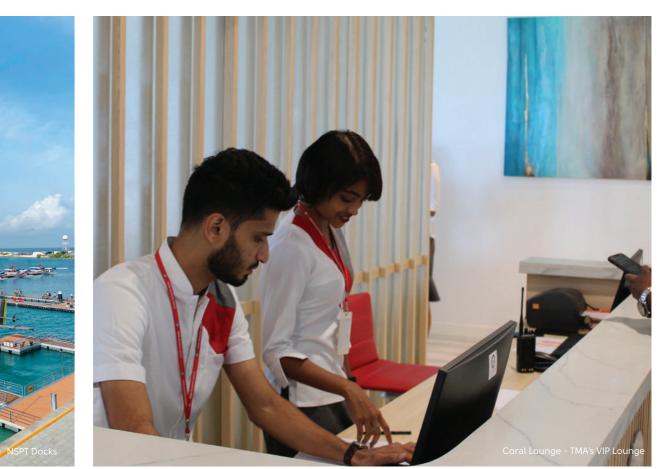
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Architecture by Gedor

One of the leading architectural companies in the Maldives, Gerdor was established in 1993. Twenty nine years on, Gedor continues to lead the Maldives in architecture and related areas. The homes, resorts and hotels, airports schools, mosques, healthcare facilities and office buildings created by Gedor can be seen throughout the Maldives.







Paintings by Oevaali

Founded in 2015 by sisters Raniya and Raya Mansoor, Oevaali Art Shop is managed and owned alongside partners Imma Rasheed and Ali Ajikko. Featuring 100% Maldivian art and design, Oevaali Art Shop is a premier and locally loved lifestyle brand of art and products in the Maldives, inspired by the ocean and the seaside.

"Dedicated to fine art and designing a life we love. Living by the currents, planning by the tides and chasing the sun. Where time doesn't move hour to hour, but mood to moment" - Oevaali

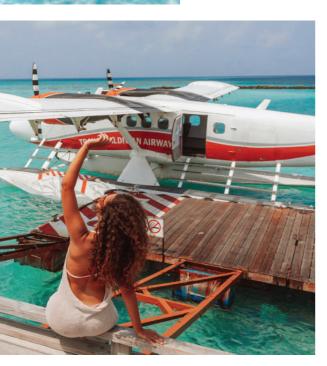














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Thakethi is a Dhivehi content publisher, and producer of educational and ornamental items. We focus primarily on humorous and educational material, and work exclusively with local artists and authors. Our current catalogue lives up to our name (meaning "stuff" in colloquial Dhivehi), consisting of books, educational products, stationery, and accessories for all ages.



VILUNÜ

Vilunü is a Maldivian brand known for creating home fragrance products, formulated using custom scent blends. These scents are a truly local reflection of island life, our traditions and the flowers & plants found on our islands. From room sprays, reed diffusers and scented beads, take home the #ScentsOfMaldives and be transported back to your holiday on our islands.





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Mula Maldives is a Maldivian owned sun care brand founded in 2020. Made in Australia, Mula sunscreens are TGA certified, made with the highest quality ingredients to cater for a global market. One of our core beliefs is protecting our beautiful yet fragile environment, hence all our products are coral reef friendly and fully recyclable. Mula is inspired by and made for the sunny people.

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SOUTH ARI ATOLL

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