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## Heralding a Tourism Revolution

an **Exclusive Interview** with

# George Corbin

the first tourist to have visited Maldives

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Dear Readers,

*It's a delicate balance between celebrating having made it into the New Year, while navigating the tensions of what is seemingly a continuation of that which has just now ended. 2020 was arguably the most difficult year of our time, and as we close the first month of 2021, it is safe to say that we still find ourselves bewildered at the circumstances that surround us. However we are to choose to hold onto hope. Our team remains committed to bringing to the front-of-mind of our readers, the wonderment that is the Sunny Side of Life. You see, no one can tell the story of their country better than its people – us. We also understand having worked in the travel and tourism industry for so many years, what goes into creating the ultimate guest experience, leveraging the vast canvas of natural splendour we call home. We salute industry players for their passion and dedication, as they too work to nurse the industry back to health under challenging circumstances.*

*As we look ahead, we draw strength from the resilience of our people, many of whom are experiencing the resurgence of curfews and mandatory quarantines to curb the spread of COVID-19. Safety is paramount, and we all have a role to play in fostering it, regardless of our current location or destination through travel. Equally, spreading a message of goodwill in the knowledge that every adverse circumstance does come to an end, is in fact our fuel. We look forward to bringing you more travel inspirations from the Maldives with each upcoming Issue.*

*In stark contrast to how the end of last year wrapped up, with 550,000 incoming tourists, the Tourism Ministry has recorded that over 121,694 tourists graced the shores of Maldives from January 1, 2021 to February 10, 2021 (p. 20). The Ministry also takes pride in the Maldives being one of the safest destinations of the world, especially with the 'landmark' COVID-19 vaccination campaign launched on February 01, 2021.*

*So, what's in the February 2021 edition of The islandchief? If there's one person who doesn't need an introduction - we have an exclusive interview with George Corbin, the first tourist who visited the Maldives on a cargo ship in 1971 (p. 12). Moreover, top experts of the profession gave us their views on how the national vaccination campaign for COVID-19 would impact tourist numbers for the year 2021 on this month's Frankly Speaking (p. 23).*

*May the year that lies ahead bring you blessings and opportunities, and may your dreams come true! A special thank you goes out to all our friends in the industry for your heartwarming feedback and contributions to the work we do in promoting your great works, and to our readers from across the world who are taking time out to read our carefully curated content on the best of our mother continent.*

*Until next month,  
The islandchief Team*

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ACROSS THE SKIES

# Maldives Passport Ranked as 1st in South Asia in Terms of Travel Freedom

For the third consecutive year, the Maldives Passport has been ranked as number one in South Asia in terms of travel freedom. Global trust on the security and integrity of the country's passport is one of the major reasons for this.



Maldives passport holders can now access 85 countries without a prior visa, listed below:

<p><b>Asia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Bangladesh</li> <li> Bhutan</li> <li> Brunei</li> <li> Cambodia</li> <li> Hong Kong (SAR China)</li> <li> India</li> <li> Indonesia</li> <li> Laos</li> <li> Macao (SAR China)</li> <li> Malaysia</li> <li> Nepal</li> <li> Pakistan</li> <li> Philippines</li> <li> Singapore</li> <li> Sri Lanka</li> <li> Thailand</li> <li> Timor-Leste</li> </ul>	<p><b>Europe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Gibraltar</li> <li> Ireland</li> <li> Kosovo</li> <li> United Kingdom</li> </ul> <p><b>Africa</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Botswana</li> <li> Cape Verde Islands</li> <li> Comores Islands</li> <li> Egypt</li> <li> Eswatini (Swaziland)</li> <li> Gambia</li> <li> Guinea-Bissau</li> <li> Kenya</li> <li> Lesotho</li> <li> Madagascar</li> <li> Malawi</li> <li> Mauritania</li> <li> Mauritius</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Mozambique</li> <li> Rwanda</li> <li> Senegal</li> <li> Seychelles</li> <li> Somalia</li> <li> South Africa</li> <li> St. Helena</li> <li> Tanzania</li> <li> Togo</li> <li> Tunisia</li> <li> Uganda</li> <li> Zambia</li> <li> Zimbabwe</li> </ul> <p><b>Oceania</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Cook Islands</li> <li> Fiji</li> <li> Marshall Islands</li> <li> Micronesia</li> <li> Niue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Palau Islands</li> <li> Papua New Guinea</li> <li> Samoa</li> <li> Solomon Islands</li> <li> Tuvalu</li> <li> Vanuatu</li> </ul> <p><b>Caribbean</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Anguilla</li> <li> Antigua and Barbuda</li> <li> Bahamas</li> <li> Barbados</li> <li> British Virgin Islands</li> <li> Cayman Islands</li> <li> Dominica</li> <li> Grenada</li> <li> Haiti</li> <li> Jamaica</li> <li> Montserrat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> St. Kitts and Nevis</li> <li> St. Lucia</li> <li> St. Vincent and the Grenadines</li> <li> Trinidad and Tobago</li> </ul> <p><b>Americas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Belize</li> <li> Bermuda</li> <li> Bolivia</li> <li> Costa Rica</li> <li> Ecuador</li> <li> Nicaragua</li> <li> Panama</li> </ul> <p><b>Middle East</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Armenia</li> <li> Iran</li> <li> Jordan</li> <li> Qatar</li> <li> United Arab Emirates</li> </ul>
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Source: [www.whenleypassportindex.com/passport](http://www.whenleypassportindex.com/passport)

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## ACROSS THE SKIES

## SriLankan Airlines Resumes London-Maldives Direct Flights

**SriLankan Airlines has resumed London-Maldives direct flights from February 13, 2021.**

In a tweet, SriLankan Airlines' Country Manager Maldives, Fawzan Fareid revealed that two weekly services have been planned to commence from Velana International Airport. The scheduled flights will depart from London on Tuesday and Saturday, reaching the island destination on Wednesday and Sunday.

SriLankan Airlines was amongst one of the first airlines to resume passenger operations to the Maldives since borders reopened on July 15, 2020. The airline operated three daily flights to the country prior to pandemic.

Most recently, SriLankan has been awarded Platinum Standard status as the highest-ranked in all of South Asia, in the global APEX Health Safety review powered by SimpliFlying following a full, independent audit of its COVID-19 hygiene & safety measures.

SriLankan Airlines, the national carrier of Sri Lanka and a member of the oneworld alliance, is an



award-winning airline with a firm reputation as a global leader in service, comfort, safety, reliability, and punctuality.

## Air India Recommences Two Direct Flights Between Maldives and India

From February 5, 2021 onwards, Air India has recommenced direct flights from the Maldives to Bangalore and New Delhi in India.



Prior to this, Air India flew directly to the Maldives from Trivandrum only. After the temporary halting of flights to the Maldives due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Air India resumed operations to the country on August 25, 2020.

Earlier in August 2020, Maldives and India further established an Air Bubble between the two countries, making it the first Air Bubble established

in South Asia. The flights are arranged in this safe corridor, provided by the local authorities, where tourists can travel straight to the respective tourist establishment from the airport without any hassle.

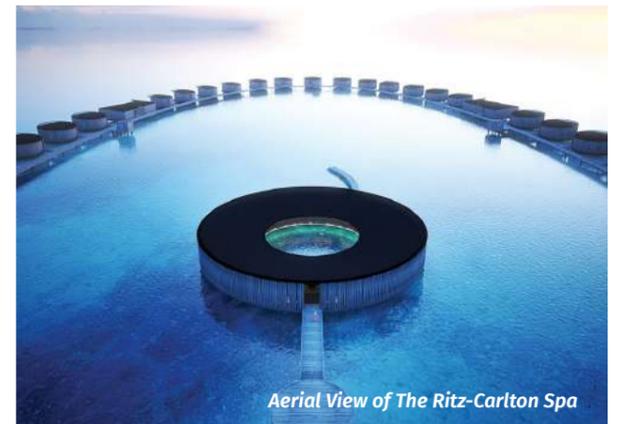
In 2020, India was ranked the top source market for tourism in Maldives. Currently, India ranks second for the year 2021, with 30,295 tourists recorded on February 15, 2020. Maldives has been reopened for

tourists of all nationalities since July 15, 2020. The stringent health and safety measures in place, and the naturally distanced nature of the Maldivian islands ensure safety for all tourists. The Maldives has also commenced the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine on February 1, 2021. The government hopes that this will increase the confidence travellers have in the Maldives, and further increase tourist arrival rates.

# A Sight for Sore Eyes



Aerial View of The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands



Aerial View of The Ritz-Carlton Spa



Sunset from the Ocean Pool Villa



Behind the scenes - Kerry Hill Architects

Continuing its thoughtful search for design and architectural authenticity, Kerry Hill Architects has again proved its design capabilities with The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands – a destination resort that stays true to local traditions and steps up to the expectations of the luxury-minded traveller.

One way of describing the success of the resort's architecture is through its embrace of the local and the international. Kerry Hill Architects encapsulates the island's spirit and philosophy, the circle of island life, through design and architecture. For KHA, this non-linear practice of architecture has no formal design methodology, but strategies have emerged through an informal process that wanders between observation, analysis and intuition; between local and universal ideas.

The interior and exterior design will be humble, minimalist and lightweight, with little environmental impact and maximum views of the horizon.

Cocooned by the clean architectural lines and sweeping curves, each villa will provide guests with total privacy. All guestrooms will feature panoramic sliding doors looking out to the horizon, in addition to a curved deck and private pool merging into the ocean beyond.

The villa interiors continue the simple approach to

detailing with a limited palette of natural materials and color hues. Furniture, rugs and fabrics, custom designed by KHA in collaboration with local and international artists, will draw influence from local craft traditions. And the calming palette of earthy tones selected for the architecture seamlessly matches the lush greens and multiple shades of blues sparkling under the sun, setting an elegant atmosphere.

In a bid to curb the impact on the fragile reef ecosystem, KHA has used prefabricated design methods and materials which ensured that no cutting was necessary on the island, reducing heavy operations and generating zero waste or pollution. From solar-panels harnessing sustainable energy to efficient use of water, every detail of the project thoughtfully lays out an environmental-friendly approach from inside out.

Where possible, natural breezes will be harnessed to cool the public spaces, while highly sophisticated glazing will be used elsewhere to limit the use of air-conditioning. This, alongside the widespread use of solar panels, the intrinsic sustainability of the design materials and the low-maintenance natural weathered finish, will enable the resort to achieve a low carbon footprint.

"The masterplan is directly shaped by ocean forces, the wind and waves. The circular villas sit comfortably in the bright Maldives sunlight,



Behind the scenes - Kerry Hill Architects

shadows are soft, and breezes flow freely between buildings" noted Kerry Hill Architects, "The design is inspired by the dual personality of the site, embracing contrasts between the open ocean and calm lagoon, daytime shade and the expansive night sky, contemplative and active spaces."

Kerry Hill Architects perfectly captures the essence of the destination's nature, embracing the circle of island life through the minimalistic circular architecture – a re-imagining of the Maldives, a meaningful tribute to the late Kerry Hill.

The resort is also part of Fari Islands, an archipelago that features three world-class hospitality brands inclusive of The Ritz-Carlton and is set to open doors this year. Guests will have access to a picturesque Fari Marina – the archipelago's communal beating heart. Built around a vibrant Beach Club, Fari Marina will be home to charming boutiques and a handpicked selection of dining options.



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## MOVERS &amp; SHAKERS



## Mohamed Mihad Appointed as Managing Director of Maldivian

**State-owned Island Aviation Services has appointed Mohamed Mihad as the new Managing Director of Maldivian – the country's flag carrier.**

Mihad's most recent post was as Board Member of Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL). He previously served as the Managing Director of Maldives Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), and Director General at the Ministry of Finance.

Prior to Mihad's appointment, Mohamed Rizvi had been serving as Managing Director of the airline, and later moved to the recently established Regional Airports

Company Ltd as Managing Director of the company.

Maldivian, the national airline of the country is the leading domestic carrier in the Maldives. Maldivian currently operates to India, Bangladesh, Thailand and China from its main hub at Velana International Airport. Today, Maldivian operates daily frequent flights to 16 airports within the country and offers competitive air transfers to all resorts in the Maldives.

## The Standard, Huruvalhi Maldives Appoints Jesper Soerensen as General Manager

**Jesper Soerensen brings over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry and has worked at properties around the world, from England and Singapore, to the US and Qatar.**

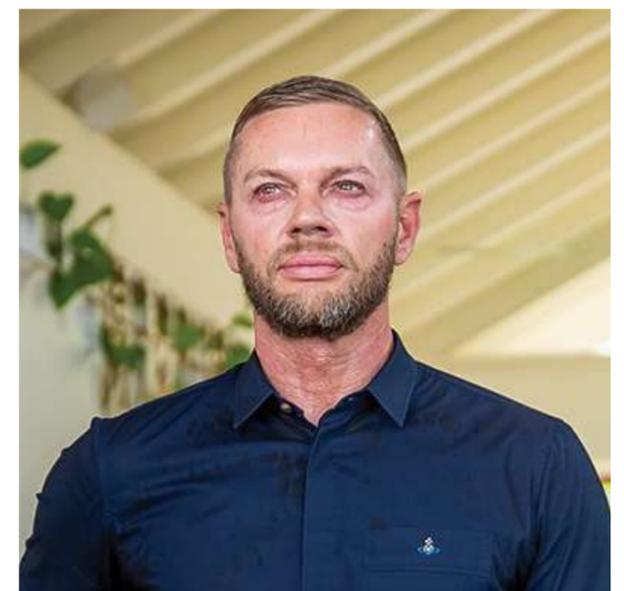
Soerensen further brings with him extensive branding, leadership, and marketing skills, as he oversees every aspect of the resort's daily operation and leads team members across multiple departments.

Prior to joining The Standard, Maldives, Soerensen filled the position of General Manager at the Six Senses Hotels and Resorts in Singapore, where he was a task force leader for the opening, branding, and management of their two five-star wellness properties, Duxton and Maxwell. He enhanced the resorts' identities and drove awareness and consumer demand with strategic branding campaigns, in addition to hiring, training, and managing a staff of 175.

"Jesper's creativity, touch with guests, boundless energy,

and positive spirit make him a fantastic addition to our team and it's a pleasure to welcome him to our paradise. He has vast experience throughout the world at some really wonderful properties and I am excited for him to help us bring The Standard's culture to life in our first island resort, and our first property in the region," said Amar Lalvani, Chief Executive Officer of Standard International.

The Standard's first island escape offers a unique blend of relaxation and social life, perfect for a romantic escape or a getaway with everyone you know. Whether an overwater villa floating or a beach front villa, each of its 115 villas will feature their own private lounge deck and plunge pool. Fill your days snorkeling on the naturally protected house reef or dive deep on boat



excursions through the local waters. If physical activity is not your thing, relax in the resort's indoor hydrotherapy oasis, The Standard Spa, complete with a communal hammam, aroma steam room, daily yoga and nine private treatment rooms to leave your body refreshed. No Standard stay is ever complete without a night to remember; so, whether dancing to tribal beats at a beach bonfire or at its glass bottom, overwater nightclub, the only thing that will end the fun is the sunrise.

## Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa Welcomes Nikolaus Priesnitz as New General Manager



**A German national with more than 30 years of experience across the globe, Nikolaus Priesnitz brings with him, global experiences from Germany, Spain, Switzerland, UAE, USA, Guam, Thailand, and Indonesia.**

Priesnitz will oversee the re-opening of Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa for stays and dining experiences from February 1, 2021 onward. Priesnitz has worked with renowned luxury hotel brands such as Hilton and Anantara in addition to luxury cruise line, Norwegian Cruise Line.

"I plan to create a culture that operates sustainably and with the least possible impact on the environment, and to build relationships with local communities in the spirit of Park Hyatt," said Priesnitz.

Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa is a barefoot luxury resort experience, evoking a remote and untouched paradise. Located on a private island within North Huvadho, the

deepest atoll in the Maldives. Its ongoing commitment to the environment won EarthCheck accreditation – the first resort in the Maldives to achieve this recognition. Built in a contemporary, vernacular architectural style, using natural materials and sensually, indulgent options such as villas with private pools and outdoor rain showers, Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa is designed to captivate and pamper. The resort's exquisite wellness spa is spread along several acres of lush, gardens with a special Yoga Studio and offers a selection of indulgent, rejuvenation treatments and therapies in its five couples treatment villas. The Dining Room and The Island Grill restaurants both offer authentic and innovative cuisines in a relaxed yet elegant atmosphere.

## NEW OPENINGS

# Exclusive Hospitality and Unforgettable Experiences in the Maldives: Ithaafushi – The Private Island Launches for most Discerning Travellers

**Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi has unveiled the exclusive Ithaafushi – The Private Island, the largest Maldivian private island spanning 32,000 square meters in the heart of the Indian Ocean.**



Spa - Wellness



Three Bedroom Beach Villa



Four Bedroom Residence - Exterior



Two Bedroom Overwater Villa Master Bedroom



Haali

Anchored in the timely yet, timeless ethos of the iconic Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts brand, part of Hilton's Luxury Brands, Ithaafushi – The Private Island will offer unparalleled levels of privacy and personalised service that create unforgettable experiences for guests seeking only the most prestigious and coveted accommodations.

"Ithaafushi – The Private Island is the crown jewel of our luxury portfolio in Asia Pacific, limitless in the level of privacy and unrivalled hospitality guests are promised," said Nils-Arne Schroeder, vice president, Luxury & Lifestyle, Hilton, Asia Pacific. "Designed for the most discerning of travellers, Ithaafushi – The Private Island is the epitome of exclusivity, perfectly placed within one of the most inspirational destinations in the world where a dedicated team anticipates every need and delivers the brand's elegant and effortless service at every turn."

"The launch of this unique resort offering represents a momentous milestone for the Waldorf Astoria brand and truly speaks to our commitment to redefining luxury hospitality around the world," Schroeder added.

Located in close proximity to Malé, guests can be escorted directly to Ithaafushi – The Private Island via a 40-minute ride on one of the resort's six luxury Ithaafushi Princess yachts or via a 15-minute seaplane flight from Velana International Airport. From the moment they land on this piece of undisturbed paradise, Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi's Personal Concierge team will ensure their every need is met with utmost discretion. Every aspect of the island has been expertly choreographed, featuring a refined, yet modern design with a nod to Maldivian charm. Its name, 'Ithaafushi' is translated to mean 'Pearl Island' in Dhivehi, the local language of the Maldives, and represents the isle's beauty and distinction.

The sprawling estate accommodates 24 guests across two elegantly designed villas and one sweeping four-bedroom residence. A two-bedroom overwater villa promises a unique ocean experience with two spacious master bedrooms complete with double dressing rooms, indoor and outdoor rain showers, a shared living room, infinity pool and jacuzzi. A separate three-bedroom beach villa, set within lush gardens has its own beach access and two swimming pools. Those staying in the four-bedroom residence will enjoy two king bedrooms, two queen bedrooms, jacuzzies and an expansive common living area, all with direct access to the beach.

The private island's dedicated culinary team will take guests on a diverse culinary journey, offering bespoke menus to be enjoyed in an array of extraordinary settings. Guests can savor world-class dining for any occasion, from in-villa dining to special celebrations in the estate's common living room, Haali (translated to mean 'the nest' in Dhivehi). Guests who want to explore the resort's various dining experiences can journey a short distance to the main island, where culinary innovation meets excellence with 10 specialty dining venues such as The Ledge by Dave Pynt and Terra.

The remarkable space, Haali, features unblocked panoramic ocean views and extends across expansive indoor and

outdoor areas, all set within a botanical sanctuary. Guests can host memorable celebrations under the stars, watch a movie on the cinematic LED screen or bask in the 35-meter infinity pool.

A plethora of watersports, diving activities and yacht excursions are available when the desire arises. For those who wish to embark on an off-island experience, guests can castaway to a private sandbank in the middle of the ocean where they can indulge in a sunset dinner, a personal yoga session or simply take in the astonishing surroundings. A dedicated Wellness Concierge is on hand at the overwater spa to provide customised therapies catering to the needs of each guest, helping them reconnect with nature while indulging in a unique spa experience. The meditation and yoga pavilion along with fully equipped gym offer magnificent ocean views, with personal training and classes upon request.

Young visitors will be in a paradise of their own on the private island estate with a dedicated children's pool and gaming area, or they can enjoy the Young Discovery Park at the main resort, which features a water recreation area and a variety of bespoke activities designed to capture the younger guests' imagination.

On this island, any desire can turn into reality. A team of Personal Concierges will be there to anticipate every need and take the brand's iconic True Waldorf Service to a new level, offering guests fully personalised service from day to night, guaranteeing experiences which will push the boundaries of imagination. "We are committed to making Ithaafushi – The Private Island a highly sought-after, world-class destination for the privileged few," said Etienne Dalancon, General Manager, Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi. "Our dedicated team is devoted entirely to ensuring every moment is absolutely personalised, with exceptional service and unsurpassed attention to detail. We will pull out all the stops to ensure the most memorable stay for our guests, every single time."

With the promise of ultimate exclusivity and every need being met with just a call, Ithaafushi – The Private Island is ideal for intimate group gatherings, from milestone celebrations with loved ones to an incentive trip planned for the most exclusive group of clients. Ithaafushi – The Private Island also offers an idyllic stage for the ultimate dream wedding in paradise, with culinary offerings and experiences that are expertly tailored by the dedicated events team to create an iconic wedding with memories that last a lifetime.

Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi operates with industry-leading standards of cleanliness and disinfection of the proprietary Hilton CleanStay program, while adhering to the Maldivian health and safety guidelines. From arrival to check in and throughout the entire stay, guests can experience an elevated standard of cleanliness and sanitization which build upon Hilton's already high standards of housekeeping and hygiene where hospital-grade cleaning products and upgraded protocols are currently in place.

For more information about Hilton CleanStay, visit [www.hilton.com/en/corporate/cleanstay/](http://www.hilton.com/en/corporate/cleanstay/)

## NEW OPENINGS

# Le Méridien Maldives Resort & Spa to Debut in September 2021

The soon-to-debut Le Méridien Maldives Resort & Spa is one of the latest additions to the Marriott's extensive Luxury hotel portfolio. The much-anticipated property aims to open its gates for visitors on September 15, 2021.



Outdoor Main Pool



The Hub - Lobby



Explore Spa by Le Méridien



Riviera - Adults-only Pool

Set in a picturesque corner of Lhaviyani Atoll nestled on Thilamaafushi Island, Le Méridien Maldives Resort & Spa is a canvas inspired by the formation of the Atolls, fringing reefs and marine life. The resort is 30 minutes via seaplane from the main Velana International airport.

Spanning 9 hectares, the island is an eco-conscious haven abundant with indigenous flora and fauna, enveloped by a shimmering lagoon and coral reefs bursting with vibrant marine life including pods of manta rays and turtles. Guests are invited to savor the sights, sounds, aromas, and tastes of the destination's six culinary venues including an overwater restaurant, experience the luxury Explore Spa by Le Méridien, bask in the sun at Riviera, the adults-only pool, and celebrate the art of travel with a curation of immersive discoveries that showcase the unique environment, above and below the waves. This new Maldives hideaway will offer 50 dive sites for marine enthusiasts.

The resort offers a vast range of luxury accommodation options, catered towards all types of guest. All 150 villas in seven categories, both on the beach and over water, are designed for comfort and ultimate luxury – some, with private pools and dedicated butlers. With local decor and warm, natural tones, the Beach Villas are scattered throughout the island and are divided into Beach Villas, Beach Villas with Pool and Lagoon Villas. For guests who are looking for the finest sands and calm seas the northern beaches are highly recommended - overlooking the lagoon. On the southern side, Beach Villas with private pools have ocean views. Direct beach access, hammocks and private pools will allow guests to embrace the true Maldivian nature.

The Water Villas are located on either side of the jetty at the eastern end of the Thilamaafushi Island. The villas come in three categories, and the Water Villas with private pools facing the sunrise.

Perched out over the Indian Ocean, the Water Villas offer a roomy deck with panoramic views and steps leading to the ocean. Large bathrooms, air-conditioning, flat-screen TVs and plush bedding with fine linen add to the chic ambience.

Designed with family stays in mind, children will delight in the Le Méridien Family concept, an immersive world where tinkering and exploring are celebrated. Whether stargazing or culture-seeking, kids are encouraged to engage in a world of make-believe and embark on real-life adventures. Both inside the resort and within the island, Le Méridien Maldives curates educational discovery experiences for families to enjoy together.

Inspired by the essence of the Maldives, combined with a passion for culture, cuisine and design, the resort is a playful sanctuary for the curious and creative traveller to discover the European spirit of savoring the good life.

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# Heralding a Tourism Revolution



an **Exclusive Interview** with

## George Corbin

the first tourist to have visited Maldives

*George, as an Italian travel enthusiast, how did you come to know about the Maldives and what inspired you to explore tourism in this country?*

In the late 1960s, I was the only tour operator in Italy that organised diving holidays. I was constantly looking for new and exotic diving destinations as I would always receive a lot of requests for diving from my clients, and also because I simply love new adventures. One day, while looking at a world map, my eyes fell upon a teeny tiny group of islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean by the name of Maldiv Islands. This was the first time I ever saw it on a map and let me tell you, I had this wonderful curiosity and feeling that I needed to go there – and soon!

*So, back in the early 70's, how did you meet the key stakeholders from the Maldives, and what was the framework behind kickstarting the now-thriving tourism industry of this small island nation?*

Well, the next thing I knew, I was on a flight to Colombo, Sri Lanka – back then, Ceylon – because it was so close to those islands. Once in Colombo, I immediately visited the Maldivian Embassy where I was introduced to a gentleman by the name of Ahmed Naseem. He, too, was just as enthusiastic and of great help. Before we knew it, the both of us were on a cargo ship heading towards Malé.

Crossing the atoll pass, and entering the Malé waters, I was breathless and full of joy, and I could only say, I was in paradise; beautiful islands surrounded and protected by coral reefs; superb white sandy beaches; hundreds of coconut trees... WOW. Once we reached Malé, I was immediately touched by the kind, gentle and humble local people.

Naseem turned out to be a great friend, a gentleman, and most of all an amazing host. During my entire stay in the Maldives, I was well taken care of. Naseem and I spent days visiting the islands. What a beautiful experience, plus the underwater world was at its top! It was so clear with an abundance of life and colours. So, we had some discussions and meetings, and decided to join forces to open up the Maldives to tourism. We built the first resort, Kurumba Village – now, Kurumba Maldives – in early 1972, and brought in the first group of tourists to ever visit these islands.

*What were some of the biggest challenges you and your team faced back then when making the arrangements to bring tourists to the Maldives?*

Unbelievable but true; the flight, landing arrangements, food, accommodation, transportation, diving and so on – everything went very smoothly. We surprised ourselves with the fantastic job we had done, Naseem on his side in the Maldives, me on my side. We had no problems whatsoever. Everything went

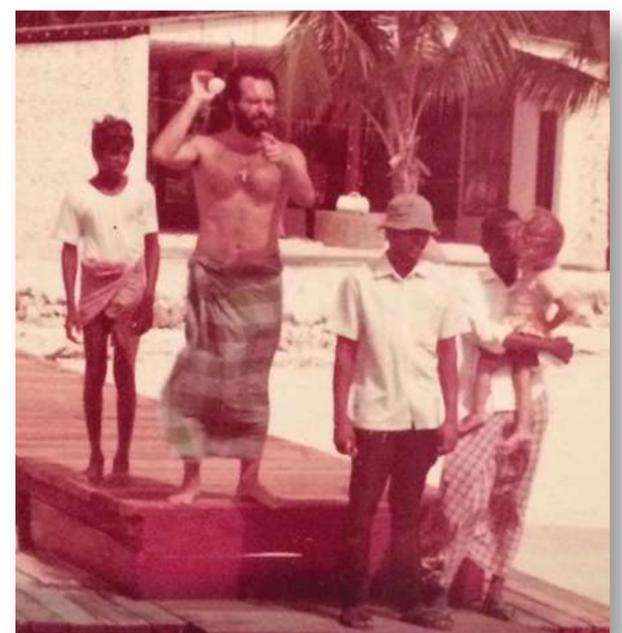
“One day, while looking at a world map, my eyes fell upon a teeny tiny group of islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean by the name of Maldiv Islands. This was the first time I ever saw it on a map and let me tell you, I had this wonderful curiosity and feeling that I needed to go there – and soon!”

In an exclusive interview with the Islandchief, George Corbin reveals how the Italian travel agent took a chance heralding tourism across the Indian Ocean, forty-nine years ago. His story tells us about his passionate efforts to promote the Maldives as a destination to shape the very foundations of tourism in the then little-known stretch of islands.

great, and considering it was the first flight, the first tourist group, and the first resort, it was a huge success – the beginning of it all. The first flight was a focal flight; we rented out a forty-five-seater. The tourists were super happy. They all had the feeling of being Captain Cook. Let's not forget, we were in paradise.

*What activities did the first group of tourists who arrived in the Maldives partake in?*

Those days things were so simple. And we, as human beings, found joy in the simple, beautiful things that life had to present. Trips to destinations like the Maldives, Mauritius and all these places were more about adventure and experiencing the natural beauty that surrounds us. That first trip to the Maldives was a holiday of pure pleasure, relaxing, the amazing beach, and mostly, of course, diving. During that time, the Maldives' waters were so virgin that the fish weren't even scared of the people swimming underwater. It was unbelievable. I would say most of the people in this first group – about seventy percent – were divers, the other thirty percent were accompanying spouses and children who had the pleasure of going to the Maldives to have a beautiful tropical holiday.



George Corbin in traditional Maldivian sarong, Kurumba Village, Maldives, 1972



A page from old Maldivian newspaper 'Moonlight' with article about George Corbin's first visit, May 21, 1972.



Article in the 'Morning Sun', February 27, 1972

**Having been in the travel industry for decades, please tell us your views on the changing traveller trends and expectations throughout the world?**

Something we know for sure is that change is constant, especially in the tourism industry – particularly with the evolution of technology. Nowadays, tourists want lots of activities, beautiful hotels and to travel to the most popular destinations. However, there will always be a good number of tourists looking for pure adventure, virgin waters, eco-tourism and most of all, just to relax under a coconut tree with beautiful sandy beaches, and unbelievable dives. I believe the Maldives has what it takes to cater to all of them.

**Please share with us your thoughts on the current state of tourism in the Maldives.**

During my last visit to the Maldives approximately two years ago, I was pleased to see great improvements such as many beautiful resorts, exciting activities and fantastic service. Now, one thing I always say is that Maldivians are extremely nice, lovely people, and amazing hosts. I've visited half the world and let me tell you, the Maldives provides great service. It is always a very pleasant experience and gives a good feeling for the visitors.

Although it is a rough patch for tourism all over the globe, I believe and hope that by the end of 2021, COVID-19 will be almost completely under control, especially with the vaccines having rolled out, and the Maldivian Islands will go back to thriving in tourism. Even today, during this pandemic, it's one of the most sought-after destinations.

**What is your philosophy on sustainability? Do you think that Maldives is on the right track in terms of sustainable tourism?**

Sustainability is crucial for all destinations. Our naturally beautiful environment and the livelihoods of local communities must come first. I feel that the Maldives is getting on the right track. I was very happy to hear that the government of Maldives recently passed a bill to phase-out all single-use plastic materials by 2023. Of course, it will be hard work to change this habit for any country, but it will definitely be worth it.

I would also suggest to reduce or completely abolish jet skis. Something I saw happen in many places like Sharm El-Sheikh, the Red Sea and so on, is that certain areas which were full of fish and teeming with life, now have no fish at all. They're gone

because of the noise and vibrations from all the jet skis. They get scared, they move, and the reefs start suffering too.

Something else I'd like to point out is the increased number of vehicles in Malé, especially the motorcycles. You don't need all that. Reducing these numbers or putting limits on them would give more space and tranquillity, mainly for the local people. In the long run, it would be greatly beneficial for future generations. I remember the first time I went to Malé so clearly – I still have those scenes in front of my eyes. Firstly, there were only bicycles – very few. There were no roads, it was just white sand, and every single day, early morning, people would come out and clean the peaceful streets, it was just beautiful! I will never ever forget those scenes.

**What does post-COVID-19-tourism look like to you? Many speak about a "new normal". Has the perception of travel and tourism changed – if in any way?**

I feel that it will change, and I'm sure it will be for the better. People will be very health-conscious, they'll be careful and cleaner. Even tourism facilities will take extra precaution. Many are developing measures to build a more resilient tourism economy post COVID-19. They are learning and preparing for more sustainable recovery of tourism, promoting the digital transition and moving to a greener tourism system. People have started rethinking tourism for the future. This will help with the recovery of the travel business. I see a bright future. I would say this year would have its ups and downs. But from next year, which is also going to be a great year for the Maldives as it is the 50th anniversary – or the Gold Jubilee – of the Maldives' tourism industry, we will see great improvements.

**What are some of the key milestone you have achieved in this industry, that are close to your heart?**

You know, I am someone who has opened up many destinations for tourism. The last destination was Saudi Arabia. I brought the first group to ever visit Saudi Arabia as tourists. Sudan, Egypt, Eritrea and more, are all destinations I have initiated tourism in since the late sixties – so you can imagine. I've been in this business all my life. I consider myself sort of like Captain Cook – I have always loved his books; you know, travelling and discovering beautifully unique, virgin destinations. But the one place that is carved into my heart one-hundred percent, is the Maldives.

Everything about it. Especially its people. I can't say this enough; the people, the hosts, they count a lot. You can go to countries where everything is beautiful, but sometimes, people's attitudes are not very welcoming and not pro tourism, which doesn't give you a good impression or feeling about your holiday. But the Maldives has it all. My dream, since a very early age, was to discover a place like the Maldivian islands, and that's why I call the Maldives 'paradise'. Yes, I have opened many destinations for tourism, but I never got that inner pleasure and happiness as I did with my Maldivian Islands.

**After having successfully positioned the Maldives on the tourism world map, what advice would you offer to the current travel, tourism and hospitality industry stakeholders in this country?**

The resorts, guesthouses, boats, they're all doing a great job. Such beautiful places – you've got it all – and the service, which is extremely important, is excellent in the Maldives.

I believe that there is still a large portion of the global market to be explored; North and South America for instance. The Maldivian government and tourism board could have a representative to cover those markets. I've talked with people from Chile, Mexico and so on, and it is very rare to meet people who have actually been there. In the United States, the potential of tourism to the Maldives – especially in diving – is huge! Visit diving clubs in those regions and spread the word about the wonderful diving spots in the Maldives. Much of my success in the past was because I visited many dive centres on a monthly basis to give them information on new destinations to explore. Also, why not start some international deep sea fishing tournaments? Deep sea fishing is a great sport, and one that brings in people with a lot of money. The Maldives is the perfect place for this and having such tournaments would promote the country substantially. Also, be grateful for your natural environment, there are not many places like the Maldives. One thing that I cannot emphasize enough though, is the humbleness of the Maldivian people.

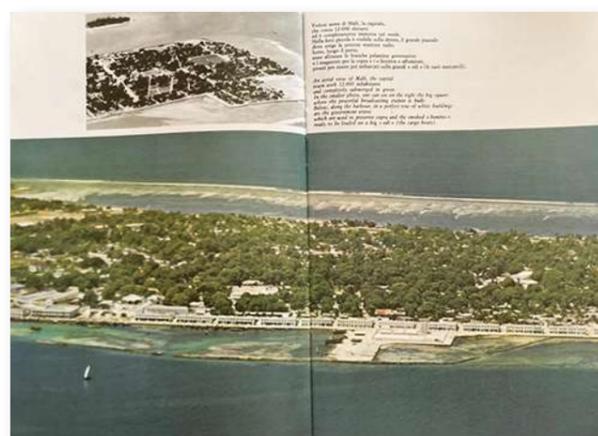
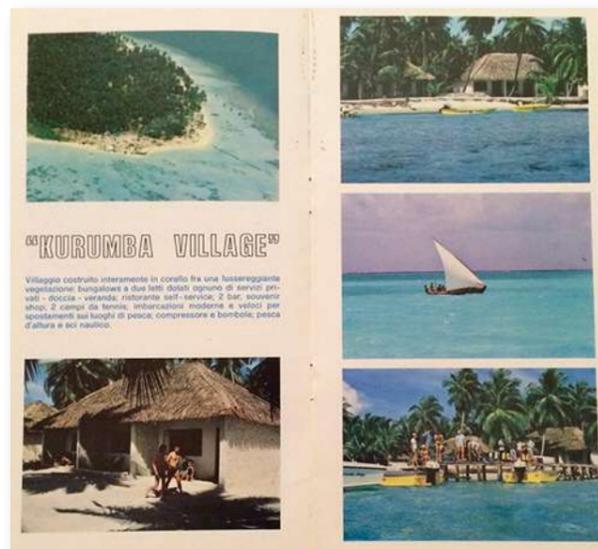


Image of Malé, 1972, from the book 'Maldivian Duemila Isola Felici'



Kurumba Village, 1972, from George's very first brochure about the Maldives

## EVENTS &amp; AWARDS

## Taj Exotica Resort & Spa Maldives Earns 2021 Forbes Travel Guide Four-Star Award

Lauded for being an independent, global rating system for luxury hotels, Forbes Travel Guide ratings are based on incognito inspector visits to every property to test up to 900 objective, stringent standards from the on-arrival greeting to customised turndown services and everything in between, rating the hotel on its service and equality of all its facilities.



Positioned as one of the travel world's most revered ratings, Forbes Travel Guide recently awarded Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Maldives, with four stars in its 2021 guide, with added appreciation of the resort having a "myriad activities for the restless".

Samrat Datta, General Manager of Taj Exotica Resort & Spa,

Maldives, stated: "It is an honor and privilege to be awarded Four Stars in this prestigious travel guide, especially following one of the most challenging years for hospitality, because it once again lists Taj Exotica Resort & Spa Maldives as one of the most outstanding properties in the world and highlights the resort for what it truly is – a secluded getaway located in one of the world's most

beautiful destinations with a plethora of excitement."

Forbes Travel Guide 2021 has described Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Maldives as a "secluded private island with starched white sands, thatched-roof overwater villas, towering palm trees and impossibly blue waters". It elaborates the resort's many activities such as windsurfing, jet skiing, waterskiing, kayaking, water boarding, PADI courses, snorkelling, plus the traditional Indian therapies at the Jiva Spa, the unforgettable sunset cruise around Hembadhu Island and the resort's fantastic line-up of dining experiences such as Tree Top Dining, Dug-out Beach Dining and romantic overwater feast atop the Ocean Pavillion. The distinguished guide further recommends staying in one of Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Maldives' overwater villas "so you can just slip off your terrace down into the lagoon, where all manner of colorful marine life awaits". Also mentioned, with special emphasis is its two-bedroom Rehendi Presidential Overwater Suite described as "a tropical paradise."

For more information:

SCAN



## Laamafaru Festival: Raising Awareness about the Coastal Environments and Ocean Protection

MUI (Maldives Underwater Initiative) by Six Senses Laamu, launched #LaamafaruFestival2020 on December 1, 2020.

Laamafaru Festival is one of the largest annual festivals to be held in the Maldives to raise awareness about the coastal environments and ocean protection. For the past four years, the event has brought thousands of people together to pledge for 'Our Ocean – Safe and Protected'.

The year 2020's fifth annual Laamafaru festival was initially planned to be held in L. Mundoo. However, the event had to be postponed due to the global health crisis. A statement on the event's Facebook page read, "Whilst the physical event may not be possible, we believe that this is a crucial time for us to adapt as a community and find new ways of coming together, educating each other and keeping marine conservation as a priority."

Due to this, MUI harnessed the power of social media and transformed the festival into social media campaign named #LaamafaruFestival2020. Under the theme "Eku Eky Dhas Kerama" (let's educate together), 14 videos were created by local schools, NGOs and other community groups which were shared with the Laamu community via MUI's social media channels. The campaign received a great response from the community, reaching over 38,000 people along with over 11,000 views – eighty percent of which were local audiences. It was also published on six local news websites.



Maldives Underwater Initiative, or MUI, is the marine biology team based at Six Senses Laamu. MUI carries out a wide range of research, education and community initiatives across the field. The campaign can be found on the MUI and Laamafaru Festival Facebook pages.

MUI:



Laamafaru Festival:



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## IN A NUTSHELL

# Amilla Maldives Resort & Residences Transforms into Neverland for Easter

This Easter, sun-seekers are invited to “think of happy things, and your heart will fly on wings” all the way to Amilla Maldives Resort and Residences.



After a challenging year for all, Amilla’s ‘Islanders’ recognised travellers are hungry for fun and escapism in 2021, so the resort has dreamed up a Peter Pan-themed Easter celebration brimming with surprises. The playful five-star resort is transforming itself into Neverland from March 29 to April 5, 2021, for youngsters – and the young at heart.

The innovative resort team has come up with a unique twist on J M Barrie’s classic tale; it cleverly weaves in the timely themes of regeneration, rebirth, hope, sustainability and ‘coming together’, which will be showcased through a variety of performances, activities and special events for all ages. ‘Peter Pan – Regeneration’ will be a ‘festival of hope’, according to the Islanders. Highlights will include shows and storytelling by Peter and Wendy (aka Des and Zoie; the in-house Area 51 Performers) involving staff and guests. Additionally, a treasure hunt, Easter egg hunt and crafting workshops presided over by (a reformed) Captain Hook will help keep the little ones entertained.

On Easter Saturday, kids can take part in creating a sustainability-themed fashion show focused on ‘fashion

for a brighter future’, showcasing the benefits of using recycled and sustainable materials. Inspired by the four elements, kids will also fly kites made from recycled paper and plastic down the runway. Magic shows, pirate circus skills, stilt-walking and acrobatics will add to the excitement during the interludes.

Easter Sunday will be celebrated with cocktails and a gala dinner by the main pool, as aerial silk performers weave shapes through the coconut trees. Then on Easter Monday, the entire afternoon will be dedicated to water-based races, games and poolside dancing with prizes at ‘Captain Hook’s Grand Splashional’. Kids of all ages can compete in an underwater treasure hunt. It will be followed by a Flamingo Parade of waterproof Easter bonnets made by the kids. The under-fives will be transported around the pool on inflatable unicorns and seahorses. There will also be a circus skills workshops and an island-wide Easter egg hunt, led by Peter Pan.

Email [stay@amilla.com](mailto:stay@amilla.com) to book your holiday at Amilla Maldives Resort and Residences.

## Visit and Save up to 30 - 50% at Centara Resorts in the Maldives

The two pristine Maldivian islands of Centara Hotels and Resorts have rolled out their latest offer for an absolutely carefree holiday, to rediscover the tropical bliss of the Maldives.

Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa and Centara Ras Fushi Resort & Spa are offering 30% savings for guests, plus an additional 20% off for CentaraThe1 members, until the end of April 2021. Guests are invited to reconnect with loved ones at the palm-fringed paradise of Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa Maldives or to restore inner peace at Centara Ras Fushi Resort & Spa Maldives, an adults-only hideaway. The offer includes; daily breakfast buffet with live cooking stations at Oceans Restaurant; non-motorized water sports and snorkeling gear; fitness facilities, beach volleyball, Wi-fi; mandatory speedboat transfer at an additional charge; plus, complimentary tea & coffee

Less than 20 minutes away from Velana International Airport by speedboat, set on a pristine island blessed with tropical beauty in North Malé Atoll, Centara Ras Fushi Resort & Spa Maldives is an adults-only retreat that is ideal for couples and honeymooners. The flowing, natural architectural forms and minimalist décor of its 140 villas blend harmoniously with the island’s green interior and white powdery beach - designed to provide sensational views of the Indian Ocean, offering the choice of beachside or overwater accommodation. Pure white sand and a sparkling blue lagoon make this a perfect playground for beach games, snorkelling and water sports, while the magical underwater world of



some of the top dive sites in the Maldives are reached within less than half an hour by dhoni. Exciting dining with a choice of dining programmes, along with a sublime spa, make this intimately scaled resort a haven for those seeking a tropical escape. Guests must be aged 12 years and above.

Surrounded by the brilliant blue ocean of South Ari Atoll, and distinctive with its timbered walkways and colonial-style buildings, Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa Maldives is a barefoot paradise with a palm-fringed



beach and shimmering lagoon that offers the perfect island holiday for everyone. With 112 spacious villas set over-water, and suites blending harmoniously with the natural setting, the island has a wealth of activities and superb facilities that makes this an ideal hideaway for couples and honeymooners, or a fun-filled destination for families. There are exceptional opportunities to discover the exotic life of Maldives underwater, with a house reef that is a kaleidoscope of colour for snorkellers, a shipwreck dive site just off the island, and easy access to some of the most famous dive sites in the world.

IN A NUTSHELL

## Enjoy a 30% Discount at Innahura Maldives Resort this Summer 2021

**Innahura Maldives Resort invites travellers to soak their negative energy in the crystal-clear waters of the Maldives and emerge with all positive vibes this summer 2021.**

Having reopened on January 31, 2021, Innahura, the perfect paradise escape in the beautiful Lhaviyani Atoll of the Maldives, is offering a 30 percent discount on all bookings for a dream summer vacation. Bookings can be made until February 28, 2021, to enjoy the special discounted offer.

Innahura takes the quintessential sun, sea and sand elements, adds a traditional twist to modern facilities and rounds it up with a generous dose of authentic experiences. This unpretentious gem in the south-east Lhaviyani Atoll tempts holiday-makers who have their sights set on an exciting Maldivian holiday.

A total of 78 vibrant bungalows line Innahura's sandy beach. Whether it be for a honeymoon, family get-together or simply a week or two of living the good life on a small island in the Indian Ocean, Innahura promises it all – with a Maldivian twist. With a firm belief that life at the beach is best paired with good food, chilled drinks and



delightful company, the resort adds to the mix of its signature relaxed vibe with chilled spaces that keep bellies full, thirst – quenched, and days – complete.

## Book in Advance and Save Up to 25% on Accommodation at Niyama Private Islands Maldives

**Niyama Private Islands Maldives is providing sun-seekers with the opportunity to save up to 25 percent for bookings made in advance, on stays for one night or more.**



Niyama Private Islands Maldives offers a range of family-friendly activities coupled with the pearly white beaches and astonishingly blue waters, ensuring that guests can indulge in as little or as much as they want. The advance rates include daily

breakfast and dinner, while offering greater savings, providing guests with more opportunity to explore the spa, cuisine and an array of exciting activities at the property. Guests can experience the naturally modern elements of the destination with dinner under the

stars, a tailored massage in Niyama Spa, family activities in the game simulator room or a day by the pool.

Promotion includes; up to 25 percent savings on accommodation when booking seven days in advance; daily breakfast and dinner; one time 60-minute Signature Spa Treatment (Pavilion bookings only); complimentary stay and dine for children.

With twin islands, Play and Chill, Niyama Private Islands Maldives offers up the luxury of choice. At Play, guests can frolic in the treetops, rush into the infinite horizon and kick things up a notch in villas set on white sands and tailored to adventurous honeymooners, active couples and style-savvy families.

At Chill, guests are invited to revel in a peaceful moment within the cocoon of Drift Spa, explore the culinary heaven offshore, soothe the soul to the slow rhythms in over water villas and lounge against the flowing oceanscape in an underwater playground.

The property has been rated number four in the 'Best Resorts in the World' category of the Condé Nast Traveler Reader's Choice Awards, and number two in the 'Top Resorts in the Indian Ocean'.

## IN A NUTSHELL

# The Marina @CROSSROADS Maldives Becomes First Partner of Maldives Border Miles

Tourists who enroll in this first-of-its-kind 3-tiered loyalty programme will earn points based on the number of visits and duration of stay.



The Marina @CROSSROADS Maldives has become the very first partner of the Maldives Border Miles, the world's first nationwide loyalty programme for tourists, offering a number of benefits

under the three tiers from their partner outlets ranging from 3% to 20% discounts. These outlets include; HardRock Café, Kebab & Kurry Restaurant, The Rock Shop®, Kinkao

Thai Bistro, Jiao Wu Chinese Restaurant, Best Dives Maldives, Len Be Well Spa, and Submore Marina.

When travelling to the Maldives as a tourist, individuals can enroll as a member of the Maldives Border Miles, and points will be rewarded when staying in a registered tourist facility, or if staying for at least three nights in Maldives. The Maldives Border Miles tiers are; Aida (bronze tier), Anantara (silver tier) and Abaarana (gold tier). Each tier is defined by a set variety of rewards, services or benefits, which increase in value as members progress. Additional points will be awarded for visits to celebrate special occasions.

With the introduction of the Maldives Border Miles programme, it is expected that tourism will boost

considerably, in addition to being a golden opportunity for returning visitors to rediscover the best of Maldives and get the most out of their visit to the sunny side of life.

CROSSROADS Maldives, opened in late 2019 and features two lifestyle hotels, Hard Rock Hotel Maldives and SAii Lagoon Maldives – Curio Collection by Hilton, both of which have direct access to extensive facilities at The Marina @ CROSSROADS, an 800-metre lifestyle area and beach walk featuring retail, entertainment and dining outlets. The Marina @ CROSSROADS offers a vast array of shopping and fashion outlets, as well as a number of sophisticated and casual dining possibilities, an incredible range of exclusive entertainment, leisure and wellness experiences.

## A day in the life of...



**LEENA PRADHAN**  
Barefoot Butler - Soneva Jani

Having being born in the beautiful land of the brave Gurkhas, amongst the tallest mountains and diverse cultures and traditions in Nepal, is what inspired Leena to join the hospitality industry as a young teenager. Speaking five languages, Leena is currently a Barefoot Butler at Soneva Jani. Barefoot Butlers are the first point of contact for guests at Soneva Jani and can be of assistance 24 hours a day. They strive to be storytellers, magic creators and communicators, familiarising guests with Soneva's philosophies of the Slow Life, 'No News, No Shoes', and immersing them in the beautiful island. Her admiration of the Soneva brand's uniqueness and sustainable luxury, her respect for Soneva's initiatives to foster women's empowerment and of course, having been raised with two sisters by a wonderfully fierce mother, is what led her to where she is today. As a licensed diver and adventure lover, she usually hangs out at the resort's Dive Centre, enjoying some water sports, learning new things about the marine world with the resort's Marine Biologist, or practicing meditation and yoga during her free time.

- 06:30** – Rise and shine. I begin my day with morning stretch and meditation
- 07:30** – Review to-do list and guest activities (Ensure the guests' breakfast pre-orders are recorded)
- 08:00** – Time for morning coffee and breakfast, and grooming for the day
- 09:00** – Attend morning Barefoot Butler meeting (discuss arrivals/departures, guest concerns, reservations for destination dining and get ideas from the team to conduct the special activities of the day)
- 10:00** – Check invoices and prepare for the arrivals and departures of the day
- 11:00** – Meet and greet guests, recommend activities and dining experiences for the day and assist them in making reservations accordingly.
- 12:00 to 13:00** – Conduct the island tour for new arrivals to familiarise them with the décor of Soneva Jani
- 13:30** – Lunch
- 14:00 to 17:00** – Assist guests with rides and coordinate with the team to create magical experiences
- 18:00** – Prepare for the evening turndown and dinner
- 18:30** – Have dinner and call my family
- 19:30 to 22:00** – Escort guest to their amazing dining experience such as So Starstruck, Director's Cut, Overseas by Mathias Dahlgren and more. Ensure that the guest's request and special arrangements are in order
- 23:00** – Review the day with the guest, get feedback, and communicate with team regarding any concerns
- 23:30** – Spend some quality time with friends and wrap up for the day



For more information on Soneva Jani:

SCAN



# Countdown to the Golden Jubilee Year of Maldives Tourism 2022

The year 2022 will see the Maldives marking 50 years of tourism.

In commemoration of the Maldives tourism industry's 50th anniversary, – the Golden Jubilee Year of Maldives Tourism 2022 – the Ministry of Tourism commenced a countdown which was launched on January 1, 2020.

The countdown, which will take place all the way through to December 31, 2021, occurs on the Ministry's social media pages including Twitter and Facebook and features video messages of industry pioneers, senior stakeholders and other relevant parties. It kicked off with a video message from George Corbin – among the very first tourists to visit the

Maldives in 1972 – and also played a critical role in the establishment of tourism in the Maldives.

The Ministry of Tourism is currently in discussion with tourism industry stakeholders to host activities for the grand celebration of the Golden Jubilee Year of Maldives Tourism 2022.

To view the very first video of the campaign:



Kurumba Village, 1972 - George Corbin brought the Maldives' first tourists, mainly journalists and photographers, in February 1972 to the country's very first resort, Kurumba Village (now Kurumba Maldives)

# Maldives Lays Out New Rules to Prevent the Decline of Wild Groupers



The new 'Grouper Fishery Management Plan' published in December 2020 stipulates that it is illegal to fish, keep on board, store, tranship, land, process, retain in a processing facility, export and attempt to export 23 species of groupers below their size limits. The plan gives the Ministry one year to enforce and implement the size limits, but is expected to come into force earlier, following the publication of the new Grouper Fishery Management Regulation in the Government Gazette.

Minister of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture, Hon. Zaha Waheed commented: "Groupers

occupy a fundamental niche in the ecosystem and their fishery and trade are lucrative economic activities in the Maldives. In light of the increasing threats to reef and reef associated fishes such as groupers, we aimed to introduce effective and timely management measures to protect their spawning stock and safeguard the livelihoods of those who are dependent on this important resource. This new management plan has been formulated through a rigorous consultation process and encompasses the principles of equity, sustainability and Ecosystem-Based Management."

New minimum landing size limits have been introduced for Brown Marbled Grouper (60cm), Camouflage Grouper (40cm), Squaretail Coral Grouper (40cm) and Roving Coral Grouper (42cm). The revised size limits of these four species are in some cases 20cm greater than those stipulated in the previous regulations.

Professor Callum Roberts of Exeter University in the UK who has studied coral reefs for more than 25 years commented: "Minimum landing sizes must be bigger than the size of sexual maturity because newly mature fish are small and contribute very little to stock replenishment. Big fish are the engines of reproduction, producing far more eggs than many small fish combined."

The new plan extends the timeframe of protection for five spawning aggregation sites to a further ten years and clearly defines the activities that are prohibited; No fishing is allowed at these sites except for trolling. Diving and snorkelling, use of motorized vehicles for water sports activities and the use of lights are prohibited at these sites between 23rd-3rd day of the lunar period. A total ban on the use of pressurized air, torches or lights, in association with gaffs for this fishery and the use of spears and gaffs to target Grouper spawning aggregations will be enforced.

Shaha Hashim, Maldives Project Manager at BLUE, said: "Spawning aggregations are the sole opportunity for Groupers to reproduce. These spawning sites can be quickly eradicated due to fishing pressure, and once gone, they are not known to recover. Fishermen from across Maldives have reported that some aggregations have already disappeared. While it is encouraging to see the timeframe extension of the five sites previously protected on paper, there is an urgent need to effectively protect at least one spawning site from each atoll of Maldives, if we are serious about managing our wild Grouper stocks."

Fisheries management plans have recently been accorded recognition within the legislative framework of Maldives under the new Fisheries Act passed in September 2019. Until now, there were only two fisheries with management plans in the country – live bait and Grouper. The new plan comes alongside other new fishery plans for reef fish, billfish, lobster, sea cucumber, marine aquarium fish and diamondback squid.

The new Grouper Fishery Management Plan (Volume 40, No. 260):



IN THE NEWS

# Maldives Listed Amongst CNN Travel’s 21 Places to Visit in 2021

The Maldives was one of the very few countries to reopen borders for travellers of all nationalities in July 2020, with stringent measures in place.



Image credit: visitmaldives.com

Regarding the Maldives, CNN Travel’s article ‘21 Places to Visit in 2021’ read: “White sand beaches? Check. World-class dining? Yep. Incredible swimming, sailing and scuba diving? Got those too. Throughout the pandemic, Maldives has also managed to keep its borders open more than most thanks to the built-in social distancing offered by its luxurious resorts.

“If anybody needed additional incentive to cross Maldives off of their bucket list in 2021, a spate of hotel openings is keeping things interesting. On deck for 2021 openings are new resorts from Ritz-Carlton, Patina, Le Meridien, Capella and Radisson Blu.

“Next year [2021] will also mark a world’s-first country-wide loyalty program: the Maldives Border Miles program will allow visitors to earn points based on how often they visit and how long they stay. After all, the only thing better than visiting is visiting twice.”

The Maldives has been listed as one of twenty-one places to visit around the world in 2021 by CNN Travel.

could be a matter of weeks away. For others, it could be coming in the middle, or even the end, of the year.”

The CNN Travel staff highlighted that although most of the world is still in the grips of the pandemic, and vaccines a long way off for many, the situation is not forever, adding that, “For some of us, escape

In line with this, the CNN Travel staff compiled a list of ‘21 Places to Visit in 2021’ for people to add to their travel bucket lists for when the freedom to explore is back in the cards.

Check out CNN Travel’s 21 Places to Visit in 2021:



# Maldives Welcomes New Record Number of Daily Tourists

A new daily record number of 4,809 tourists have arrived in the Maldives on Friday, February 12, 2021.

This is the highest number of tourist arrivals recorded on a single day so far this year. On February 10, 2021 a total of 121,694 tourist arrivals were recorded from January 1, 2021. Presently, the top source market for tourist arrivals is Russia, followed by India and United Kingdom. Other top markets include Ukraine, Germany, United States, France, Kazakhstan, Romania and United Arab Emirates.



Currently, there is no mandatory quarantine for arrivals, but all tourists are required to fill an online health declaration form within 24 hours prior to departure and submit a negative COVID-19 PCR test result conducted maximum 96 hours prior to departure to the Maldives.

over 550,000 tourists in the year 2020 in light of the global health crisis. Additionally the Maldives won the prestigious title of the “World’s Leading Destination” awarded by the World Travel Awards 2020.

With the commencement of vaccinations in Malé on February 1, the Ministry of Tourism has also made the necessary arrangements for tourism sector employees to receive their dose in convenience at the resorts.

As the Maldives continues to overcome economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the country received

Top 10 Markets					
2021 (as of 10 February)			2020		
#	Market	Arrivals Share (%)	#	Market	Arrivals Share (%)
1	Russia	27,041 22.2	1	India	62,960 11.3
2	India	26,292 21.6	2	Russia	61,387 11.1
3	Ukraine	8,867 7.3	3	United Kingdom	52,720 9.5
4	Kazakhstan	5,848 4.8	4	Italy	46,690 8.4
5	Romania	5,403 4.4	5	Germany	36,435 6.6
6	Germany	4,686 3.9	6	China	34,245 6.2
7	France	4,104 3.4	7	France	28,031 5.0
8	United Kingdom	3,118 2.6	8	U.S.A.	19,759 3.6
9	Czech Republic	2,941 2.4	9	Switzerland	12,517 2.3
10	Switzerland	2,796 2.3	10	Ukraine	10,343 1.9

# MACL Attains ISAGO Certificate for the Third Consecutive Time

**Maldives Ariports Company Limited (MACL), the Ground Service Provider of Velana International Airport, received the ISAGO Certification – Safety Audit for Ground Operations by International Air Transport Aviation (IATA) – in 2016, 2018 and 2020.**

At a special ceremony the Safety, Security and Quality Section of MACL handed over the ISAGO certificate to the Managing Director of MACL.

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

During the ISAGO certification process, required manuals were developed for ground operations and regular internal audits were carried out. Velana International Airport has acquired benefits such as improved safety, better business reputation and more quality control.

IATA's ISAGO programme is an internationally-recognised system for assessing the operational management and control systems of an organisation that provides ground handling services for airlines. ISAGO is based on industry-proven quality audit principles and is structured to ensure a standardised audit with reliable results across aviation businesses. As the businesses of ground services providers are very diverse; ranging from airside passenger transport



and baggage handling to load control and cargo handling, the ISAGO approach combines a framework of audit standards, suitable for all Ground Services Providers with specific standards

for each individual activity. This enables the ISAGO audit to be utilised by ground handling companies of all sizes from a single station to multinational enterprises.

# MTCC Takes on the First Phase of 'Integrated National Public Ferry Network' Project

**Following consultations with his Cabinet, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has commissioned the first phase of the 'Integrated National Public Ferry Network' project to the Maldives Transport and Contracting Company Plc (MTCC).**



The company will be undertaking the works of this large-scale project following the Cabinet's decision reached after deliberations on a paper submitted by the Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. According to the President's Office, the project will introduce efficient, affordable, convenient and sustainable passenger and cargo ferry services to all administrative islands of the country.

According to MTCC, the project will contribute to achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its broad socio-economic impact.

The main objectives of the ferry network include facilitating inclusive regional development by connecting people and services, accelerating social and economic growth, improving efficiency in the delivery of public services and improving mobility and accessibility for all citizens in all areas of the nation.

Consisting of six central regions, the proposed network is said to provide two separate networks for passenger transit and cargo ferry services within and in between the regions – linking maritime transport with land and air transport.

BON APPÉTIT

# COCONUT ICE-CREAM



Martinianus Chrishardianti is a Pastry Junior Sous Chef from Indonesia, with 14 years of patisserie experience. She has worked in Indonesia, Qatar and Brunei before coming to the Maldives. She won the silver medal for a plated dessert at the 2019 Hotel Asia Culinary Competition in the Maldives.

*“This ice-cream recipe has been delighting guests in Kuda Huraa for years and has achieved legendary status among our ‘regulars.’”*

## Ingredients

- Fresh milk 800 ml
- Glucose 500 g
- Sugar 950 g
- Stabilizer 25 g
- Egg yolks 15 pcs
- Coconut puree 4 litres

## Method

- In a saucepan over medium heat, bring the milk and glucose to a boil.
- In a mixer whisk the egg yolks slowly; meanwhile mix the sugar and stabilizer together in a separate bowl. Once the latter is properly combined, gradually add it to the egg yolks in the mixer until it becomes fluffy. Remove from the mixer.
- When the milk boils, pour half of the milk on the yolks and stir slowly. Then pour the rest into the saucepan on low heat and stir continuously until mixture thickens. Remove from the heat, strain into a large bowl placed over an ice bath.
- Add the room temperature coconut puree to the bowl and stir it in.
- Churn the mixture in the ice cream machine according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Keep it in the freezer for several hours until hardened.

Serve and enjoy.



Courtesy of  
**Martinianus Chrishardianti**  
 Pastry Jr. Sous Chef  
 Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa



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# Frankly Speaking

**Maldives has been one of the few destinations in the world to have its borders opened for tourism and the only in South Asia. Having the national vaccinations campaign for COVID-19 launched on February 1, 2021 - would this entail a demand in attracting tourists? Do you think this would have a significant impact on tourist arrivals for 2021?**



**Ahmed Afrah**  
President  
National Boating Association of Maldives (NBAM)

Today, safety will be the top priority for any holiday maker when choosing their holiday destination. The Maldives, with our naturally isolated islands and a range of liveaboards options, caters very well to that requirement. And when you further add the fact that our small nation has commenced a national vaccination campaign and has emphasised on vaccinating the frontline tourism workers, this will give even more confidence to the traveller. Vaccination will also ease the anxiety which tourism workers and their families currently have and this ease of mind will result in better service to the holidaymakers. I am confident that a successful national vaccination campaign will have a significant positive impact on the tourist arrivals for this year.



**Mohamed Ali**  
Vice President  
ATA Maldives

I firmly believe that the vaccination programme will have a significant positive impact on the tourist arrivals for 2021. Our small population and geographically dispersed islands have helped us so far in many ways during this pandemic. Further, together with the vaccination, my say on this is that we may even end up having a growth in tourist arrivals in 2021 compared to previous best years.



**Mohamed Firaq**  
Managing Director  
Inner Maldives Holidays

While the risk to public health in the island nation is relatively low, the economic costs are estimated to be devastating. As in most countries around the world, the working class in the Maldives, particularly from the hospitality industry, is disproportionately affected.

This vaccination programme in the Maldives is critical for the prevention and control of infectious-disease outbreaks. They underpin global health security and will be a vital tool in the battle against antimicrobial resistance of the people of Maldives and the national economy. I urge to speed the programme of the nation-wide vaccination in the country, for surely this will help our nation tremendously.



**Mohamed Ali Janah**  
President  
National Federation of Maldivian Employers (NFME)

What keeps tourists visiting the Maldives are threefold. One, that our borders are open, secondly, the health and safety status of the destination, and thirdly, the boundless beauty of this country. This reality and perception of how COVID-19 has been significantly well-managed compared to our other competitors makes us a more favourable place to visit under these dire circumstances. To know that the Maldives is carrying out a mass vaccination programme to cover the entire population will further increase the confidence for those travelling to the country, and I believe this will help boost a positive attitude towards the Maldives which directly leads to increased arrivals.



**Abdulla Salih**  
Managing Director  
Damas Group

Maldives had always been, because of its geography, very attractive for tourists looking to have a detached holiday. Our protocols of opening and keeping safe offered better confidence. The availability of vaccines, especially on offer to staff at resorts will only offer additional confidence



**Ahmed Zubair Adam**  
Managing Director  
Blue Horizon

With so many new beds coming in every year, the Maldives has changed from excess-demand-over-supply-destination to a surplus-beds-destination and much work is needed to tap into new segments and new countries as source markets. With the COVID-19 vaccination programme underway, it will bring safety to the front-liners and to the people of Maldives. Demand is from the source market, and if source markets adopt a policy of restricting travel (like in Italy), then there will not be an increase in demand. But let's say a government such as China decides to allow the Maldives as a safe bubble for Chinese New Year, in addition to the Maldives vaccination programme taking place, then demand could increase during Q1 and Q2. Of course, there will be an increase in demand as the world gets vaccinated and starts travelling in Q3 and Q4, 2021, but we also have to bear in mind that most of the world economies are in a recession and we may have to continue with our discounts.



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