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TASTE OF ADVENTURE

AUTHORIZED DISTRIBUTOR **Kity** ENTERPRISES PVT. LTD.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

with

**Mr. ABDUL AZEEZ
ABDUL HAKEEM**

Vice President
Atmosphere Foundation, Maldives

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A Different Perspective

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Dear Readers,

As we step into 2025, we are elated to usher in a new year brimming with inspiring stories and the dynamic essence of the tourism and hospitality industry. This issue symbolizes a fresh beginning—an invitation to embrace new horizons and continue celebrating the extraordinary realm of travel and hospitality.

Reflecting on 2024, we bid farewell to a year marked by exceptional milestones in tourism and conservation. The nation witnessed transformative achievements, from welcoming the first cruise ship under groundbreaking regulatory reforms to the discovery of a new damselfish species, a testament to our rich marine biodiversity. The anticipated launch of seaplane operations at Hanimaadhoo International Airport is set to enhance regional connectivity, while Air India's direct flights from New Delhi and Mumbai to Malé further expand opportunities for travelers to experience our idyllic islands.

Sustainability remains at the forefront of our journey. Initiatives like Soneva Namoonaa's sustainable waste management practices and SriLankan Airlines' efforts to promote Gan Island exemplify our collective commitment to innovation, collaboration, and safeguarding the natural splendor that defines the Maldives.

In this edition, we spotlight an industry trailblazer, Mr. Abdul Azeez Abdul Hakeem, Vice President of the Atmosphere Foundation, Maldives. Since beginning his illustrious career in 1978, Mr. Azeez has played a pivotal role in reshaping the Maldivian tourism sector, driven by a vision to showcase the islands' unparalleled beauty and vibrant culture. At the helm of the Atmosphere Foundation, he now leads transformative social, economic, and environmental initiatives. Dive into his inspiring journey, explore the Foundation's impactful projects, and gain insights into his unwavering commitment to sustainable community development.

For our Bon Appétit section (pg. 22), we feature Chef Michel Muffat, Executive Chef at Kuramathi Maldives, who presents his recipe for Duck Leg Confit. Inspired by a trip to northern Thailand, Chef Michel fused the flavors of the traditional Khao Soi soup with the classic French duck leg confit, a nod to his heritage. Born in Haute-Savoie, France, Chef Michel embarked on his culinary journey in 1979 at the Hotel School of Thonon-les-Bains. His passion for culinary excellence has taken him across France, Switzerland, Portugal, England, Korea, and Thailand, enriching his expertise and philosophy. Currently managing nine à la carte restaurants, three buffets, and a bakery at Kuramathi Maldives, Chef Michel has spent two decades delighting guests with innovative and unforgettable dining experiences.

Our "Frankly Speaking" segment on page 23 delves into critical industry perspectives, exploring how recent changes in the Maldives' financial ecosystem are expected to shape the tourism sector as we enter 2025.

To our readers, partners, and contributors—thank you for being an integral part of this remarkable journey. Together, let us make 2025 a year of boundless opportunities, memorable experiences, and extraordinary achievements.

Here's to exploring, connecting, and thriving in the year ahead.

Until next time,
The Islandchief Team



HISTORY OF COWRIE SHELLS IN THE MALDIVES

Cowrie shells were historically vital to the Maldives, serving as the island nation's first currency and making it a key global supplier for centuries. From as early as the 13th century, Maldives fishers, particularly women, raised and harvested cowries through aquaculture. Ibn Battuta noted in the 1300s that over 40 ships annually exported cowries, which were valued as currency across Africa, Asia, and Europe for their durability and portability. This trade fostered cultural significance, strengthened connections with regions like Indonesia, Malaysia, and China, and supported the expansion of the tuna fishery through regular maritime traffic.

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MACL to Launch Seaplane Services at Hanimaadhoo International Airport



The Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL) has announced plans to introduce seaplane services at Hanimaadhoo International Airport, marking a significant step in diversifying its operations and boosting revenue potential. The initiative aims to establish the airport as a key aviation hub for the northern Maldives.

Speaking to the Parliament’s State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) Committee, MACL Deputy

Managing Director Mujthaba Latheef emphasized the importance of seaplane services for the airport’s profitability. “We will establish a seaplane service very soon. The airport’s feasibility as an international hub significantly improves with such services,” he stated. Plans are also underway to construct a dedicated seaplane terminal to support these operations.

Efforts to integrate the Regional Airports Company

into MACL are progressing, with a share exchange agreement involving the Privatisation and Corporatisation Board (PCB), Regional Airports, and MACL set to be signed this week. This transition is expected to streamline operations and enhance the efficiency of airport services.

Hanimaadhoo International Airport is undergoing a comprehensive USD 136.6 million development project aimed at transforming it into a major aviation hub. The new 2,465-metre runway, capable of accommodating aircraft carrying 250–300 passengers, was inaugurated in October 2024. A 1,200-metre section of the runway became operational earlier this year, replacing the older runway designed for smaller planes.

The development is set to conclude by February 2025, enabling the airport to handle up to 1.3 million passengers annually. This upgrade is expected to drive economic growth and enhance tourism in the northern Maldives, particularly in the Greater Thiladhunmathi region.

Hanimaadhoo International Airport, one of the largest regional investments in the Maldives, is poised to become a vital hub for both international and domestic aviation. The addition of seaplane services will further strengthen connectivity, open new economic opportunities, and support the development of northern atolls, solidifying its role as a cornerstone of regional progress.

Air India Launches Direct Flights from New Delhi and Mumbai to Maldives

Air India has introduced daily direct flights connecting New Delhi and Mumbai with Malé, Maldives. This connection will meet the increasing demand for convenient travel options to the Maldives.

For passengers from New Delhi, Flight AI 2273 departs at 10:15 AM and reaches Malé at 1:50 PM, with a flight duration of around four hours. The return flight, AI 2274, leaves Malé at 2:50 PM and arrives in New Delhi at 7:25 PM.

From Mumbai, Flight AI 2271 takes off at 9:30 AM and lands in Malé at 11:50 AM, with a flight time of approximately three hours. The return journey, AI 2272, departs Malé at 12:50 PM and touches down in Mumbai at 4:05 PM.

This new service appeals to both leisure and business travelers alike. A popular destination amongst Indian travelers, renowned for its breathtaking lagoons, world-class diving and snorkeling, and opulent overwater villas, the



Maldives continues to be a vacation hotspot . With the introduction of these direct flights, travelers can

now enjoy a more convenient journey to the Maldives

Maldives Seaplane Story, A Different Perspective



An electric driven advanced air mobility vehicle

It was a group of Danes, in 1993, who began the regular inter-transfer of tourists between the country's main airport and various resort islands.

Commercial operations began with two aircraft, one single and the other dual engined, with a smaller single engined aircraft set aside for training. Operational experience gained through use of both aeroplane types that also turned out to be a steep learning curve, proved the twin engined aircraft, the Canadian made Twin Otter, extinct then, but going through a renaissance today, with its ruggedness and versatility, as the ideal aircraft on floats for the environment and purpose, being the case even today with close to 100 in active operation.

Seaplanes first operated at a dredged out narrow area of the lagoon alongside the airport runway. Despite the area being near parallel to the runway it was common to see seaplanes operating, in a meandering manner, to avoid the surrounding shallows, perhaps why the area got addressed as 'bowling alley' by the legendary initial expatriate pilot community.

The resultant reduction in travel times taken between airport and resorts

paved the way for much needed investor confidence on the viability to develop more outer lying islands as tourist resorts, a much-needed requirement for the tourism industry. Thus, the need to expand the scantily begun seaplane service got identified. Perhaps one of the, if not the primary reason for the ubiquity of seaplanes in Maldives is the contrasting number of people able, at a time, to sit in an airliner and a seaplane, a machine far inferior, in carrying capability to a modern-day airliner.

A markable ease on the limited seaplane operations occurred when a significant amount of sand in some parts of the lagoon too shallow for seaplane use got pumped for the making of Hulhumale. Completion of the works turned out to be significant and a sigh of relief for both air traffic control and seaplane operators as movement throughput increased dramatically.

With increased seaplane flying complexity started creeping in and conflicts between seaplanes and other aeroplanes began to occur. A major complaint was seaplanes getting too close to aeroplanes taking off and landing on the runway. Without a radar service and inflight use procedures

dependent on radio reports by aircraft, a large amount of airspace near the airport had to be allocated to safeguard the much more stringent requirements for normal traffic. Thus, the first flight paths for seaplanes, were created to keep them away from these areas.

The next major change for seaplanes should have occurred when radar air traffic control service was introduced. However, with no airspace and operating procedure change the full potential benefit of the radar remained

seaplanes became frequent which resulted in the starting of surveillance-based flight information service exclusive to seaplanes, a service turning out to be a prudent safety initiative with improved situational awareness for all.

With municipal airports cropping up all over Maldives and the advanced air mobility industry getting to a really exciting phase, where day after day news from around the world showing, the first commercial flights of



An early float equipped Twin Otter

hindered. In effect it was radar-based air traffic control with primitive operational procedures.

A notable change to the long-serving seaplane operational procedures of the mid90's occurred with the inevitable airspace reorganization required for formal transfer of aircraft operations to the newly built runway, in 2022. together with as a preventive reactive measure to the increasing airspace events between seaplanes and other aircraft within airspace limits at domestic airports that had cropped up. Seaplane departure and arrival routes were segregated, from those used by others, thus infusing a certain extent of law and order on seaplane movements. However, close encounters between

electrical vertical takeoff and landing vehicles is edging closer to reality, the epic Maldives seaplane operation, probably, has reached its pinnacle and change has is inevitable.



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IN A NUTSHELL

Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru Marks 30th Anniversary with Exciting New Enhancements



Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru celebrates the 30th anniversary of its parent brand, Banyan Tree, with exciting updates. The resort has unveiled refreshed villas, expanded its Marine Lab, introduced two new restaurants – Saffron and Sangu Garden – and curated new guest experiences. These enhancements invite travelers to reconnect with the Maldives' original charm and its natural beauty.

"We're proud to celebrate Banyan Tree's 30th anniversary at Vabbinfaru," says General Manager Hery Kuswoyo. "This milestone reflects our commitment to sustainable tourism and preserving the Maldives' authentic spirit through refreshed villas, wellness

experiences, and connections with the local community."

Refreshed Villas: A Blend of Luxury and Tradition

Located in the North Malé Atoll, Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru offers 48 all-pool villas surrounded by white sand beaches, lush vegetation, and vibrant coral reefs. Upon arrival, guests are welcomed with traditional Maldivian music and a "barefoot ritual." The newly refreshed villas feature the Thundu Kunaa Art Wall, handcrafted by local artisans, and watercolors by renowned Maldivian artist Ahmed Nazim. Every detail, from handwoven textiles to eco-conscious materials, is thoughtfully crafted to balance luxury and sustainability.

Marine Lab: Leading Marine Conservation

Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru's expanded Marine Lab continues its leadership in marine conservation. Since 2004, it has offered educational programs such as coral planting, reef cleaning, and snorkelling tours. A key initiative, the Marine Environment Officer Seedlings Programme, partners with the Maldives National University to provide students with training in coral restoration and marine biology, empowering local communities to contribute to marine preservation.



New Wellbeing Experiences

Guests can immerse themselves in new wellbeing offerings like Lagoon Floating Therapy and Underwater Meditation, which promote relaxation and connection with nature.

Saffron Restaurant: A Celebration of Thai Cuisine

Saffron, the signature Thai restaurant, now offers a menu curated by Chef

Tipaporn Phianthong (Chef Tipa), known for her innovative approach to Thai cooking. The restaurant blends traditional recipes with modern twists, providing a unique culinary experience.

Sangu Garden: A Taste of the Maldives

Sangu Garden Restaurant celebrates local flavors with a menu featuring responsibly sourced seafood and produce. The design incorporates sustainable materials, creating a seamless connection to nature.

Michelin-Starred Chef at Madi Hiya

Madi Hiya, the resort's award-winning Japanese restaurant, hosts Michelin-starred Chef Hideaki Nagaya for a special four-night dining event, blending Japanese and French culinary traditions.

Exclusive Dine-Around Experience

The resort's dine-around concept offers an all-inclusive package that includes unlimited drinks, afternoon tea, and exclusive offers on spa treatments, diving, and more.

These celebrations at Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru mark the start of a journey toward its own 30th anniversary in 2025, reinforcing its commitment to sustainable luxury and exceptional guest experiences.

Mercure Maldives Kooddoo Teams Up with MaRHE Centre for Dolphin Conservation

Mercure Maldives Kooddoo Resort has entered into an exciting partnership with the MaRHE Centre at the University of Milano-Bicocca to support research on tropical marine ecosystems in Gaafu Alifu Atoll.

The collaboration will focus on the area's unique dolphin populations, which are known to be resident—a rare phenomenon in the Maldives. As part of the initiative, scientists and students will investigate why these dolphins choose to stay in the region.

The partnership will also look into coral reefs and reef fish, enhancing the understanding of the southern Maldives' marine environments. The research will involve identifying dolphin species,

analyzing population structures, and using molecular ecology methods to examine their diet. Coordinated by Professor Paolo Galli, Director of the MaRHE Centre, the project offers valuable hands-on experience for students pursuing marine biology.

"I am proud of this project, which allows us to expand our knowledge of marine ecology in these underexplored areas," said Professor Paolo Galli. The collaboration, facilitated by Italian Consul Giorgia Marazzi, has already begun. It involves two master's students from the International Marine Sciences program, who are conducting fieldwork under the expert guidance of cetologist Elena Valsecchi. Their research includes photo identification, vocalization



recordings, and environmental DNA analysis, all supported by Mercure Maldives Kooddoo Resort.

On December 12, 2024, the resort will host a special event to share the current

findings with key stakeholders in the Maldives. This partnership aims not only to deepen the understanding of the southern Maldives' ecosystems but also to promote eco-tourism and highlight the country's extraordinary marine life.

Kaani Hotels Celebrates 12 Years of Pioneering Local Island Tourism in the Maldives



Kaani Hotels, the leading hotels & guesthouse chain in the Maldives, proudly held its 12th anniversary with a week-long celebration honoring its remarkable journey and commitment to exceptional hospitality in the Maldives.

Starting from humble beginnings with a single 18-room guesthouse, to now operating four properties and expanding toward an over 600-room portfolio, Kaani has been a leading example in the Maldivian tourism landscape since its inception. This celebration commemorates the company's growth

and reinforces its dedication to both employee well-being and community development.

The anniversary represents Kaani Hotels' success through a series of engaging employee-focused activities. The celebrations began on the 3rd December with a Flag Hoisting Ceremony inaugurated by the CEO, Mr Abdulla Nasheed & COO, Ms Asima Saleem, followed by a special WeRun Edition that was held to highlight health and well-being amongst employees, a Tree Planting Initiative and a team breakfast.



Continuing the celebrations, the company conducted several other activities such as team-building fun games, a futsal competition, and a fishing competition to strengthen relationships and boost team spirit, allowing staff to enjoy shared experiences outside the workplace. The events concluded on December 9, 2024 with a colorful Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony highlighting and honoring the outstanding achievements of Kaani Hotels' dedicated employees, reinforcing the company's appreciation for its team.

As a gesture to recognize and reward long standing employee dedication, Kaani Hotels owners gifted two Umrah pilgrimages to employees selected through a lucky draw, who have completed 5 years of service.

"Our 12-year journey is a testament to the incredible dedication and growth of our team," said Mr Abdulla Nasheed, CEO & MD of Kaani Hotels, "What started as a small guesthouse has transformed into a thriving hospitality group, it is testament to the incredible the unwavering commitment of our employees who have been the driving force behind our success. We extend heartfelt gratitude to our partners and guests for their support throughout this remarkable 12-year journey."

The company is currently expanding with two additional properties set to open in 2025 and diversified its portfolio to include a resort, set to open in Vaavu Atoll in 2027.

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IN A NUTSHELL

Four Seasons Maldives Hosts Renowned Chef Toshiyuki Kobayashi for Exclusive Culinary Experience



Trust the chef. It's both an invitation and a promise at Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru this winter as the island welcomes Japanese maestro Chef Toshiyuki Kobayashi or "Toshi" for an exclusive culinary pop up. From December 28, 2024 to January 25, 2025, guests at the resort can book to experience the visionary artistry of an omakase chef at the top of his game.

With just two sittings of 16 diners per night, five days a week, and daily-changing menus, the lucky Landaa guests who secure a booking are invited to "expect the unexpected." Omakase means "trust the che" in Japanese and Chef Toshi's artistry is so renowned that his Kobe-based sushi restaurant Sushi Toshi is booked up months in advance.

Bringing Sushi Toshi's modern

Japanese setting to Landaa Giraavaru, diners can expect an immersive, eye-level experience with Chef Toshi himself. His approach is both distinctive and focused, transforming seasonal ingredients into an exquisitely curated selection of sushi, sashimi, grilled and steamed dishes, guiding diners on a journey of discovery through refined flavours and masterful technique.

"Sushi is a lifelong passion for me," says Chef Toshi. "What fascinates me about sushi is that it's meant to be enjoyed in a single bite, where each flavour harmonises perfectly in the mouth. The order in which it is served allows for a rich storytelling experience, making sushi truly captivating. We craft a sequence of dishes, showcasing varied textures, flavours and cooking styles to tantalise the palate, creating a harmonious progression that unfolds

with each bite, revealing the depth and artistry of the cuisine."

Merging science with sensation and precision with creative flair, Chef Toshi is laser-focused when it comes to ingredients and cooking styles. His specificity sees an exacting approach to everything from the marinades and vinegars to his dazzling skillful preparation. Rice is cooked in an earthen pot to match the timing of each guest's arrival, with a special emphasis on its texture, temperature and balance of vinegar. Chef Toshi blends three kinds of vinegar to achieve the exact flavour required – Kyoto's Chidori vinegar, Tokyo's Yokoi Jozo's Tamashizuku, and Yohei vinegar – along with Ehime's wasanbon (traditional Japanese sugar) and Fukuoka's Mataichi salt. This unique blend has a bold tang that pairs perfectly with tuna, sea urchin, shrimp

and other toppings. Each evening presents a feast for all the senses, with guests able to watch Chef Toshi's creativity in action – and savour the results.

"We're thrilled to have Chef Toshi bringing his extraordinary artistry to Landaa's shores this winter," comments Regional Vice President and General Manager Armando Kraenzlin. "Having experienced his precision and focus firsthand, I know that our guests are in for a mesmerising treat. Each dish is led by ingredient availability, in-the-moment creative flair and the diners themselves, promising a truly interactive dining experience that's not to be missed."

Chef Toshi's Omakase menu will be available from December 28, 2024 to January 25, 2024, 5 days a week, with seating at 7:00 and 9:00 pm.

Bandos Maldives Celebrates 52 Years of Timeless Hospitality

This year, Bandos Maldives proudly marks its 52nd anniversary, celebrating over five decades of excellence as the iconic Island of Hospitality. This milestone is not just a reflection of their enduring legacy but a celebration of growth, transformation, and unwavering dedication to creating unforgettable moments for their cherished guests.

Nestled just ten minutes from Velana International Airport, Bandos Maldives has been a sanctuary for travelers seeking tranquility, peace, and authentic Maldivian charm. For 52 years, they've welcomed families, friends, and couples from around the world, becoming a beloved destination where traditions are

formed, and memories are etched in the sands of their idyllic shores.

A Year of Change and Renewal This year, Bandos Maldives has embarked on exciting projects to enhance the guest experience. From the launch of a brand-new website in November to the ongoing renovations of resort facilities, they remain committed to evolving while preserving the warmth and authenticity that define their brand. Their solar power projects further reflect our dedication to sustainability, ensuring Bandos remains a leader in responsible tourism.

The Heart of Bandos: Guests and Team their legacy would not be complete without their loyal guests, many of whom return year after year, becoming

an integral part of the Bandos family. Equally, their team of talented individuals—many hailing from the Maldives—has been the backbone of their success, representing the essence of true Maldivian hospitality.

Looking Ahead: Continuing the Journey As they celebrate this momentous occasion, General Manager Ismail Rasheed reflects on the journey with gratitude: "Bandos Maldives has grown and evolved over the years, yet our heart remains the same. We owe our success to the loyal guests who continually choose Bandos as their home away from home and to our team, who embody the spirit of hospitality every day."

Join them in celebrating 52 years of



remarkable hospitality, cherished traditions, and exciting transformations. Bandos Maldives—where every guest is family, and every moment is a celebration.

Sun Siyam Olhuveli Maldives Appoints Maya Hamid as New Director of Spa And Wellness



Sun Siyam Olhuveli announces the appointment of Maya Hamid as the new Director of Spa and Wellness effective immediately. A seasoned professional in the industry, Maya returns to the Sun Siyam family in the Maldives, bringing her innovative approach and sharp attention to detail. Her expertise has

driven successful spa marketing initiatives, enhanced treatment offerings, and boosted revenues through strategic budget management and cost efficiency.

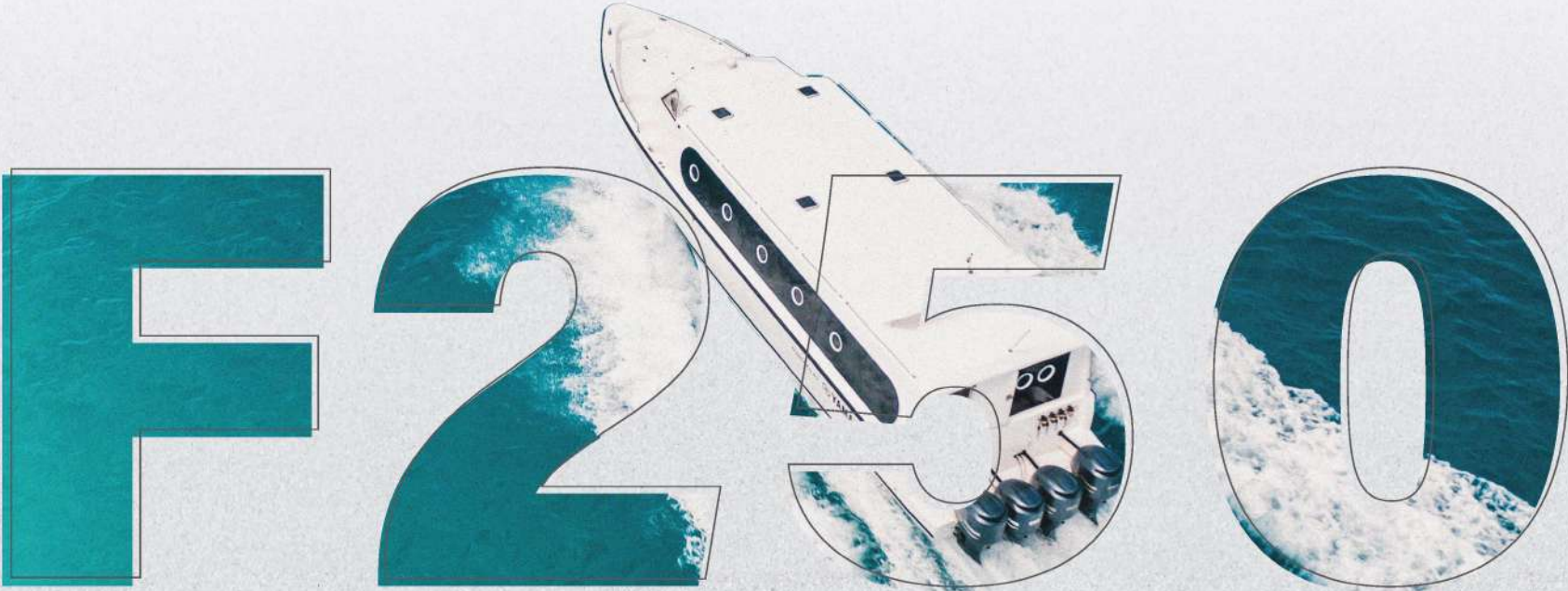
With over 20 years of international experience, Maya has worked with

renowned luxury hotel and resort brands such as Shangri-La, Marriott International, Hilton, Waldorf Astoria, Accor Hotels, and Starwood. Her career spans key destinations including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, India, and the Middle East, with a notable tenure as Cluster Director of Spa at Marriott International in Saudi Arabia, where she successfully elevated spa operations across multiple properties. Previously serving as Spa Manager at Siyam World, Maya gained invaluable insights into Sun Siyam Resorts' values and operations, further refining her expertise in spa management, guest experience, and leadership within the wellness industry.

"We are excited to welcome Maya Hamid to Sun Siyam Olhuveli. Her expertise, creativity, and leadership in the spa and wellness industry align perfectly with our vision of providing

world-class wellness experiences. We anticipate her contributions will further enhance our offerings and elevate the exceptional service we deliver to our guests," said Hassan Adil, General Manager at Sun Siyam Olhuveli.

Maya, originally from Indonesia, holds a degree in Spa Operations and Management from Chiva Som International Spa Academy in Thailand. She brings extensive expertise in spa operations, guest services, and team leadership. At Sun Siyam Olhuveli, Maya will oversee spa and wellness operations, leveraging her proven management skills and dedication to delivering outstanding wellness experiences. With a passion for health and a rich international background, Maya is committed to ensuring Sun Siyam Olhuveli remains a premier destination for spa and wellness enthusiasts.



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Six Senses Maldives Welcomes Sara Pinto as Regional Assistant Director of Sales

Six Senses Maldives is pleased to announce the appointment of Sara Raquel Pinto as Regional Assistant Director of Sales. Sara will oversee both of the brand's Maldivian properties: Six Senses Laamu, renowned for its pioneering marine conservation initiatives, as well as Six Senses Kanuhura, celebrated for its picture-perfect beach setting.

With nearly a decade at Six Senses, Sara

is passionate about our brand values and brings with her extensive expertise in luxury hospitality sales. Sara joins the team from Six Senses Ibiza, where she oversaw the European and Brazilian markets as Sales Manager. Originally from Portugal, Sara's journey began at Six Senses Douro Valley, advancing through various sales and marketing roles, ultimately excelling as Sales Manager, building key market partnerships.

"Six Senses Laamu has long been a pioneering property for the brand, and it's exciting to see how Six Senses Kanuhura is quickly becoming a rising star," says Sara. "Being part of these incredible projects and teams is truly inspiring and I can't wait to explore the beauty of the Maldives, including its stunning underwater world, and share it with people around the globe."



Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa Welcomes Suziane Spencer as New Director of Sales



Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa is delighted to announce the appointment of Suziane Spencer as its new Director of Sales. Bringing a wealth

of experience in hospitality sales, she has a multilingual background with fluency in five languages and a proven track record with some of the world's premier brands.

Suziane is set to lead Sheraton Maldives towards exciting growth opportunities and expand the resort's presence in key international markets.

Suziane's career in the hospitality industry has spanned several high-profile roles at renowned properties, including Hilton Cabo Verde Sal Resort, the JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa, W Maldives, The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort, and Sheraton Maldives (as part of the Cluster Team), and most recently at JW Marriott Maldives as Market Account Director. Throughout her career, Suziane has led teams to achieve remarkable revenue targets and has represented these brands at international exhibitions, strengthening industry relationships and significantly enhancing brand visibility across the European and UK markets.

Suziane holds a Master's degree in Digital Marketing & Analytics from ENEB Online

Business School and a Bachelor's degree in International Hospitality & Tourism Management from the BBI – Luxembourg International Business Institute.

"I am honored to join Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa, a property that truly embraces excellence and innovation," Suziane shared. "My goal is to build on Sheraton's strong foundation, creating partnerships and crafting experiences that resonate deeply with our guests and partners. I look forward to contributing to the success of this incredible resort by nurturing relationships and elevating our position in the global market."

The resort welcomes Suziane's vision, dedication, and vibrant enthusiasm, aligning seamlessly with Sheraton's commitment to creating meaningful guest experiences. Her leadership marks the beginning of a promising new chapter for Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa.

The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands Welcomes New Director of Sales and Marketing, Sandrine Boutin

The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands is pleased to welcome Sandrine Boutin as the new Director of Sales and Marketing for the property. Sandrine's esteemed career spanning over 24 years in travel, hospitality, and ultra-luxury, brings a wealth of experience and strategic insight to her new role.

Sandrine has held leadership roles with globally renowned brands such as Soneva, The St. Regis Bali, and AMAN, where she consistently delivered outstanding results. Her expertise encompasses diverse market segments, including travel trade, corporate, MICE, as well as partnerships.

In her new role at The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands, Sandrine will lead the

commercial team, including sales, marketing, and reservations, while overseeing the strategy and direction of sales and marketing to ensure the resort is well represented in all key markets. Her proven ability to develop and execute innovative strategies in a fast-moving and highly competitive market positions her to guide the resort into the future and explore new and developing markets, aligning with its ethos of delivering unparalleled luxury.

Sandrine's appointment reflects The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fair Islands' commitment to excellence as it continues to redefine luxury hospitality in the Maldives.



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BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

with

**Mr. ABDUL AZEEZ
ABDUL HAKEEM**

Vice President
Atmosphere Foundation, Maldives



“We value grassroots perspectives and understand that those living in the communities often have the best understanding of the challenges they face and the opportunities for meaningful interventions.”

In this edition's cover story, we feature an exclusive interview with Mr. Abdul Azeez Abdul Hakeem, Vice President of the Atmosphere Foundation, Maldives. Now at the helm of the Atmosphere Foundation, he champions impactful social, economic,

and environmental initiatives across the Maldives. Discover his inspiring journey, the Foundation's transformative projects, and his perspectives on driving sustainable community development.

Can you share the story behind your journey into the hospitality industry and what initially sparked your passion for it?

I joined the hospitality industry in 1978, alongside some of my colleagues, when we recognized the immense potential of tourism in the Maldives. At that time, the Maldives was still an emerging destination, and the concept of hospitality here was in its infancy. We saw a unique opportunity not just to build a business, but to create meaningful experiences that highlighted the natural beauty of our islands and the warmth of our culture.

What inspired the creation of the Atmosphere Foundation, and how has its mission evolved over time?

Atmosphere Foundation was founded as a non-profit, non-governmental organization by the Co-founders of Atmosphere Core, with the purpose of enabling a brighter future for communities in the Maldives. The idea was to promote and assist existing charities and voluntary services, delivering civic engagement and community development, and sponsoring and organizing education and training.

Our approach to CSR has evolved significantly. We moved away from one-off donations to a more structured framework that prioritizes measurable objectives and tangible outcomes, specifically targeting the most vulnerable in society. The purpose was to create meaningful impact over a longer period of time and enable the community itself to become more self-sufficient.

Our mission is to mobilize funds and invest in

meaningful social, economic, and environmental initiatives that are impactful and measurable. This approach stems from our core belief in the "Joy of Giving," a value that is at the heart of all Atmosphere ventures. By adopting a systematic and organized methodology, we ensure our CSR efforts create lasting, positive changes in the communities we serve.

What do you see as the most pressing challenges for community development in the Maldives, and how is the Atmosphere Foundation actively addressing these issues?

The biggest challenge we face is ensuring sustainability of community development initiatives. When we invest time, funds, and resources in a community project, our goal is to create meaningful, lasting change. We typically partner with local partners to implement time-bound projects, with the understanding that local organizations and the community will take ownership and sustain the benefits beyond the project period. When we provide infrastructure or equipment, we encourage our implementing partners to take responsibility for its upkeep after a certain period, to ensure that such benefits are accrued to the community in the long term.

Similarly, with training, we hope it equips individuals with skills that lead to better educational or economic opportunities. However, we often observe challenges such as participants leaving midway through the program or failing to apply the skills they've learned. Additionally, many local communities lack an enabling environment to support the practical use of skills—such as the infrastructure needed to produce goods or offer services and access to markets.

Another significant challenge is the migration to the Greater Malé area. This trend affects the sustainability of local ventures, as the declining population in island communities makes investments less feasible and impactful, and creates a disconnect between the resources provided and their long-term viability.

To address these challenges, we emphasize the importance of planning sustainability into every project and actively engage with our partners to ensure they commit to taking ownership. While it's not always easy, we strive to balance our support with efforts to empower communities to sustain the benefits of our initiatives on their own.

Could you highlight some of the foundation's key achievements or projects that have made a significant impact on local communities and the environment?

In just three years from our inception, we have successfully invested in 18 impactful projects from education and community welfare to environmental conservation.

- Our first project was establishing Kakkaa Vathi, a state-of-the-art training kitchen at Imaduddin School in Malé. Students with diverse learning abilities follow a certified culinary curriculum. So far, 44 students have gained skills, and two graduates are pursuing higher education at the Maldives National University, fully sponsored by us.
- We refurbished the study room at the Children's Center in Fuvahmulah City by providing new furniture, computer systems, and educational materials.
- In partnership with local NGO The Reading Room, 1,500 teachers and 1,330 parents trained in early literacy teaching methods. This initiative also

- supported interactive workshops for 5,000 students across the Maldives, promoting reading and writing skills.
- Collaborating with Aged Care Maldives, we reached 614 senior citizens across four atolls through health screenings, medical check-ups, caregiver workshops, home visits, and an eye camp.
 - With the Alzheimer’s Society of Maldives, we organized dementia awareness and screening sessions in major population hubs. This project trained 75 screeners and screened 747 individuals for dementia.
 - We supported ARC (Advocating the Rights of Children) to assess 91 children in Faafu Atoll for speech and hearing impairments and conducted a workshop for 45 teachers to improve articulation in speech.
 - In Haa Dhaalu Vaikaradhoo and Shaviyani Goidhoo, we trained 29 women in soft toy-making skills. For Vaikaradhoo, we are working with the women and local authorities to establish a mechanism to sell their products to resorts or other buyers.
 - In Fuvahmulah City, we provided training in carpentry, pastry and bakery, housekeeping, and computer programming for 25 participants, of whom 11 passed competency assessments, enhancing their job prospects.
 - Our flagship Bamboo for Climate Change Mitigation project focuses on planting bamboo for environmental and economic benefits. We have collaborated with local authorities and NGOs and planted over 4,000 bamboo trees in 30 locations across the Maldives, and contributed 500 saplings to the government’s Rahfehi program, which promotes environmental restoration and resilience-building.
-
- We supported Olive Ridley Project Maldives in hosting the Vaavoshi Festival to raise awareness about marine ecosystems.
 - For World Environment Day in Vaikaradhoo, we organized community events, including workshops on bamboo crafts, environmental awareness, composting, and photography. Activities also included essay writing, drawing, and bamboo craft competitions. We assisted the island council in monitoring the reef and mangrove areas and supported the establishment of the Vaikaradhoo Bamboo Park, which is now a community hub.

Through these initiatives, we aim to create meaningful impact by empowering communities, enhancing livelihoods, and contributing to environmental sustainability. Our commitment to measurable outcomes and long-term benefits ensures that every project we undertake aligns with our mission to create a better future for the Maldives.

What are the main goals of the Bamboo for Climate Change Mitigation project, and how has it helped the environment and communities?

The Bamboo for Climate Change Mitigation project was launched to contribute to climate change mitigation efforts in the Maldives, aligning with the Government’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement. This initiative reflects our commitment to supporting sustainable, nature-based solutions to tackle environmental challenges.

Bamboo, a fast-growing grass, is renowned for its versatility and ecological benefits. One of its most notable characteristics is its ability to act as an efficient carbon sink. A mature bamboo grove produces 30–35% more oxygen than an equivalent forest area. To generate this oxygen, bamboo absorbs significant amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, storing the carbon in its biomass. This exceptional capacity for carbon sequestration makes bamboo a

natural and effective solution for mitigating carbon emissions.

To maximize the impact of this initiative, we invited Dr Barathi a leading bamboo scientist from India, to share expertise with government officials, businesses, civil society, and the media during the project’s inauguration. We are also in discussions with the MNU to conduct research on bamboo growth and carbon sequestration in Maldivian conditions. This research will provide valuable insights into bamboo’s long-term contributions to mitigating climate change and supporting sustainable development.

In addition to its role in climate mitigation, bamboo offers diverse practical applications like durable furniture, utensils, and other everyday products, an eco-friendly alternative for construction purposes in sustainable housing and as natural windshields, protecting vulnerable areas from erosion and wind damage.

The groves we planted are now a year old, and most are thriving. While it will take some months to fully measure their impact, the early results are promising. We have already seen signs of their potential to improve the local environment.

Our vision for the bamboo project is not only to contribute to environmental conservation but also to create opportunities for economic growth in the Maldives. By promoting bamboo cultivation and its varied applications, we aim to help communities adopt sustainable practices that align with global efforts to combat climate change.

Can you enlighten us on how healthy aging programs support the needs of Maldivian communities?

Health is a primary concern for the elderly, and early detection of ailments can significantly improve their quality of life. Aging often comes with physical, emotional, and social challenges, and our goal is to address these issues holistically through targeted interventions. Our approach goes beyond immediate assistance to focus on sustainable solutions. By partnering with organizations such as Aged Care Maldives, we have facilitated programs that include caregiver workshops, home visits, and community-based support, ensuring that elderly individuals receive the attention, compassion, and assistance they need in their daily lives.

By training caregivers, whether family members or professionals, we equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide quality care. This includes understanding the physical, emotional, and mental needs of older adults and techniques for handling common age-related conditions with sensitivity and respect.

These initiatives not only address immediate health needs through proper referrals for timely treatment but also create awareness among communities. Elderly people are among the most vulnerable groups in our society, and we firmly believe they deserve all the support we can provide to help them live healthier lives.

How does the Atmosphere Foundation collaborate with local and international partners to drive meaningful change?

All our projects are implemented in close partnership with local stakeholders. This ensures that our initiatives are deeply rooted in the needs and aspirations of the communities we aim to support. Collaboration is a cornerstone of our methodology, as it allows us to draw on the expertise, insights, and

commitment of local organizations to create impactful and sustainable outcomes.

We have built strong partnerships with local entities, including schools, colleges, island councils, women’s development committees, and local NGOs. Each partner brings unique strengths to the table, enabling us to address community challenges comprehensively. Schools and colleges play a critical role in skill development and educational projects, while women’s development committees and NGOs provide invaluable insight into social and economic issues specific to their regions.

How can individuals or local communities get involved with the Atmosphere Foundation's projects and contribute to its mission?

We are always open to initiatives that contribute to meaningful socio-economic and environmental change. Our mission is to support projects that create positive, lasting change in local communities, and we believe that collaboration with those on the ground is key to achieving this.

Local communities and individuals are encouraged to approach us with project concepts that align with our goals. We value grassroots perspectives and understand that those living in the communities often have the best understanding of the challenges they face and the opportunities for meaningful interventions. Whether it’s an idea for enhancing education, empowering women, improving healthcare, or promoting environmental sustainability, we are eager to explore ideas that can make a difference.

What are the Foundation's future plans, particularly in terms of growth, new initiatives, or expanding its impact?

We are committed to launching projects and ensuring their long-term viability and impact. It is essential that the benefits of these projects extend beyond immediate intervention and continue to make a difference in the community over time and support projects until we are confident that their benefits can be sustained without external assistance.

Our approach to new projects remains consistent: we look for initiatives that address the most pressing needs in the community while ensuring the projects are designed for sustainability. Whether it’s supporting educational programs, fostering economic opportunities for marginalized groups, or addressing urgent environmental challenges, we are committed to contributing to the Maldives’ overall development.

Ultimately, our focus is on creating projects that will stand the test of time. We will continue to offer support where needed, ensure the benefits are maintained, and work with local partners to build sustainable systems. By doing so, we can ensure that our initiatives not only provide short-term relief but also lay the foundation for long-term positive change across the Maldives.



NEW OPENING

Barcelo Nasandhura Malé Set to Become Capital's Largest Hotel with Opening in Q1 2025



Barcelo Nasandhura Malé is set to open in the first quarter of 2025, becoming the latest luxury destination in the Maldives. Located on the former site of the Nasandhura Palace Hotel, it will stand as the largest hotel in the capital city, Malé. The property will feature 136 elegantly designed rooms, with 95 offering breathtaking ocean views, as well as 116 luxurious serviced apartments. Barcelo Nasandhura Malé is poised to provide a distinctive combination of sophistication, comfort, and convenience in the heart of this vibrant city.

Operated by the renowned Spanish hotel chain, Barcelo Group, this new addition

marks a significant expansion of the brand's presence in the Maldives and globally. Known for its premium resorts, the group recently opened the Barcelo Whale Lagoon Maldives in the South Ari Atoll in August 2024, further strengthening its growing portfolio in the region. Alongside its Maldivian properties, Barcelo Group manages several high-profile hotels across Europe, Thailand, and the UAE. The group was also awarded the World's Leading Hotel Management Company 2023 by the World Travel Awards.

The hotel will feature a wide range of luxury facilities, including four upscale dining outlets, an oceanfront pool, a

state-of-the-art gym, a rooftop shisha bar, and a luxurious spa. With a spacious 1,034 square meters of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) space, it will also serve as an ideal venue for corporate events and gatherings.

Although some of the serviced apartments were initially intended for residential use, they will now be available for daily rentals. This change offers guests greater flexibility and more accommodation options. While the hotel was initially set to open on December 1, 2024, minor construction delays have postponed the grand opening. However, the team remains committed to ensuring

the property is ready to welcome its first guests in Q1 2025.

Barcelo Hotel Group, which was founded in 1931, operates 280 four- and five-star city and holiday hotels across 25 countries, offering more than 62,000 rooms. As the second-largest hotel chain in Spain and one of the top 30 largest globally in terms of room count, the group markets its hotels under four distinct brands, each tailored to offer guests unique and memorable travel experiences. Known for its commitment to both excellence and sustainability, Barcelo continues to provide exceptional stays by seamlessly integrating luxury, comfort, and environmental responsibility.





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EVENTS & AWARDS

Women in Management, IFC and the European Union Honor Maldivian Women at 'Professional and Career Women Awards 2024 – Maldives'



The 'Professional and Career Women Awards 2024 – Maldives' by Women in Management Maldives (WIM Maldives) in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) – a member of the World Bank Group – and the European Union (EU) successfully concluded, honouring exceptional Maldivian women across the country who have made remarkable contributions to their respective fields.

This initiative, which is supported under EU's regional initiative 'Accelerating Climate Smart and Inclusive Infrastructure in South Asia (ACSIIS)', demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing gender equality and empowering women economically.

The 6th edition of the Awards celebrated women representing diverse professions such as banking and finance, hospitality, media, legal, logistics and supply chains, entrepreneurship, amongst others, for their outstanding achievements and inspiring influence on their communities. The event also recognized Maldivian organizations that have played a pivotal role in promoting women's business leadership and growth.

The event was graced by distinguished dignitaries, including Dr. Aishath Shiham, Hon Minister of Family and Social Development; Dr. Maryam Mariya, Hon Minister of Higher Education, Labor, and Skills Development; H.E. Mrs. Takeuchi Midori, Ambassador of Japan to the Maldives. Additionally, Ms. Barkha Tamrakar, the First Secretary (Political) from the High Commission of India, and Mr. D. Amanulla, Deputy Head of Mission of the Sri Lankan High Commission were in attendance. Several other State Ministers and Deputy Ministers also honored the occasion with their presence.

"The Professional & Career Women Awards in the Maldives celebrate a decade-long partnership between WIM and IFC, now extended with EU's support to promote sustainability and diversity. WIM Maldives is committed to empowering the 2024 Award winners to become role models for equitable and inclusive workplaces. This collaboration underscores our shared vision for women's leadership as a cornerstone of sustainable growth," said Sulochana Segera, Founder and Chairperson of Women in Management (WIM).

Speaking about the awards, Wendy Werner, Country Manager for IFC India and Maldives said, "Globally and in the Maldives, companies are increasingly recognizing that they can gain greater competitive advantage and improve profits by targeting women as employees, entrepreneurs, consumers and business leaders. As we celebrate the inspiring women across the Maldives, a unique opportunity exists to further strengthen, promote, and amplify their voices as professionals and leaders in the private and public sectors. These awards are a testament to this, and an inspiration for many more brilliant and ambitious women everywhere – and IFC is honored to be a part of this journey."

Highlighting the partnership, Dr. Johann Hesse, the Head of Cooperation at the European Union Delegation to the Maldives stated, "The women recognized are not just leaders in their respective fields but are also architects of change. Their achievements resonate with the European Union's commitment to creating sustainable and inclusive economies where women thrive as equal participants and decision-makers. ACSIIS is our flagship program under the Global Gateway initiative that aims to foster climate-resilient development in South Asia and through this collaboration we aim to amplify women's voices and support their endeavours to build a resilient & equitable future."

Speaking at the event, Minha Faiz Rashaad, President of WIM Maldives, remarked, "Women, especially women of color, face barriers to leadership often imposed by systems that fear their potential. I want my daughters to grow up seeing women in leadership as a reality, not just a dream. Equality is not just a women's issue—it's a social issue that requires men to stand with women and challenge systems of oppression. When women lead, everyone thrives." She also highlighted, "Even in a geographically dispersed country like ours, women are breaking barriers and leading their communities. This year's awards, held in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation and the European Union, mark a significant step toward advancing gender equality and creating lasting change in the Maldives and beyond."

With over 50 nominations, the judging, which was



conducted purely based on merit, was chaired by Fathimath Manike, Development Banking Director at Bank of Maldives. Joining her on the panel are Abdul Latheef, President of SME Federation Maldives; Manoji Wadugodapitiya, Managing Director of PAMS Hydro Group, Sri Lanka; Mariam Waheeda, Permanent Member of Maldives Scout and Guide Fellowship; Pramita Ray, Gender Specialist for South Asia at IFC; and Dr. Ravi Dissanayake, Professor in the Department of Marketing Management, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

Speaking about the award winners, Panel Chair Fathimath Manike stated, "We observed that some candidates failed to include details of their achievements in their profiles, which were later highlighted upon query and during the interview process. Due importance was given to education, skills, and the impact the candidates have made in creating opportunities and supporting other women and the community as a whole. Additionally, candidates who have worked in their current positions for less than two years were not considered. They must serve a minimum of two years in their role before applying for the next award."

The 'Professional and Career Women Awards – Maldives' was powered by gold sponsor – Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL), partner – Medtech, Supporting Partner – Maldives National University, host partner – Kurumba Maldives and media partner – One Media Group.

With over 170 past award winners from Maldives, the 'Professional and Career Women Awards – Maldives' aims to showcase the significant role women play as leaders, employees, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders in contributing to sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the country.

EVENTS & AWARDS

Atmosphere Core Shines at NSURE Safety and Sustainability Awards



International hospitality company Atmosphere Core achieved significant recognition at the prestigious Recognition of Safety and Sustainability Achievements Awards 2023 to 2024, organised by NSURE, a leading authority in Food Safety, Health and Safety, and Sustainability in the Maldives.

Atmosphere Core received the prestigious 'Outstanding Overall Performance Award for Resort Group 2023 to 2024' award for the unwavering commitment to maintaining the highest food safety standards across its properties and setting a benchmark in the hospitality industry. Anupam Banerjee, Vice President Food & Beverage at Atmosphere Core, accepted the accolade on behalf of the company, reflecting the collective drive across the portfolio of nine resorts to ensure excellence in food safety.

OBLU SELECT Sangeli received the 'Innovative Sustainability Project 2023 to 2024' award, which acknowledges the resort's exceptional contributions to sustainability and its dedication to preserving the pristine ecosystem it calls home. Representing the OBLU SELECT Sangeli team, Marine Biologist Giorgia Maggioni and Executive Assistant Manager Sribanta Kumar Acharya accepted the awards.

The awards also honoured outstanding individual contributions. Sourish Bishnu Jana, Learning and Development Manager from Atmosphere Kanifushi was celebrated for his dedication, receiving the award for 'Outstanding Commitment by an L&D Manager in Food Safety 2023 to 2024'. His efforts in leading food safety training have been pivotal in maintaining high standards within the resort.

Mei P. Pun, General Manager at VARU by Atmosphere, was honoured as the 1st

Runner-up for the 'Outstanding Leadership by a General Manager in Food Safety' award. The 1st Runner-up accolades also included Ravikant Reddy, from VARU by Atmosphere, for 'Outstanding Commitment by an L&D Manager in Food Safety' and Chef Chaitanya Sharma from OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI for 'Exceptional Leadership by An Executive Chef in Food Safety'.

The award ceremony was also attended by four nominees from Atmosphere Core. Chef Sandeep Kumar from OBLU SELECT Sangeli and Chef Ajay Sahoo from OBLU NATURE Helengeli by SENTIDO, who were both nominated for 'Exceptional Leadership by an Executive Chef in Food Safety' award. Baiju Asokan from OBLU SELECT Sangeli and Rahul Pillai from VARU by Atmosphere were nominated for 'Outstanding Leadership in Engineering for Safety Excellence' award.

Ashwin Handa, Senior Vice President of Operations at Atmosphere Core, said "I am immensely proud of our team's dedication to upholding the highest standards across our resorts, ensuring exceptional experiences for our guests while staying true to our ethos of Joy of Giving. This philosophy drives us to create meaningful and memorable moments for our guests, teams, and communities alike, while fostering a culture of responsibility and innovation. These accolades reflect our unwavering commitment to safety, sustainability, and excellence".

NSURE, renowned for its rigorous evaluation and high standards, acknowledged Atmosphere Core's ongoing efforts in integrating sustainability and safety into its operations while delivering exceptional guest experiences. These accolades serve as a reflection of the company's unwavering dedication to leading by example in the hospitality sector.



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EVENTS & AWARDS

Visit Maldives Club Officially Launches “Burunu Boma”, Maldives’ Biggest Sports Fishing Tournament



The Visit Maldives Club (VMC) officially launched the Maldives’ biggest sports fishing tournament, “Burunu Boma,” on December 20, 2024, at a ceremony held at the Malé Table Tennis Hall. The event was honoured by the presence of the Minister of Fisheries and Ocean Resources, Ahmed Shiyam.

The launch marks a significant step in promoting sports tourism in the Maldives and highlights the nation's commitment to sustainable fishing practices. The Burunu Boma tournament, scheduled to take place between April and May 2025, is designed to attract international fishing enthusiasts and participants from the

Maldives tourism industry. The Burunu Boma microsite and the winner’s digital shield were also unveiled at the event.

Minister of Fisheries and Ocean Resources, Ahmed Shiyam affirmed the substantial contribution of the sports fishing community, particularly within the Maldives. He identified the Burunu Boma tournament as the largest of its kind in the nation and announced its upcoming venue as Crossroads Marina, marking a significant first for the location. The Minister expressed confidence that this event will further stimulate tourism and attract a greater number of sports fishing enthusiasts to the Maldives.

"This is just the start," declared MMPRC CEO and MD Ibrahim Shiuree, outlining a strategy to diversify Maldivian tourism. "With several events leading up to it, Burunu Boma will become a flagship international sports fishing festival. We aim to secure a prominent place on the international tourism calendar, making the Maldives a direct destination for sports fishing enthusiasts," MMPRC CEO and MD Ibrahim Shiuree explained.

Ahmed Saaif, President of Visit Maldives Club, emphasized the long-term vision for the tournament, stating, "This tournament is planned in such a way that it will be held each year,

establishing it as a key event in the Maldives tourism industry."

The Burunu Boma tournament strongly emphasizes the “catch and release” method, prioritizing the protection of the Maldives’ marine environment. This commitment to sustainability aligns with the Maldives’ broader tourism strategy, which has focused on environmental protection since the inception of the industry.

The Visit Maldives Club aims to elevate the Maldives' position as a premier global destination by supporting sustainable practices and showcasing the nation's potential for sports tourism.

8th Edition of Food & Beverage Show to be Held in January 2025

The highly anticipated 8th edition of the Food & Beverage Show is set to take place from 23rd to 26th January 2025 at Central Park Hulhumale’. This edition extends the event to four days, an expansion from the previous three-day format, making it the largest edition yet.

Dedicated to trade visitors, the first day of the event will see a grand opening, with only registered trade visitors attending from 4pm to 8pm. From 8pm onwards and for the next 3 days, the public can visit and experience the diverse range of innovative products including beverages, delectable treats, fitting the taste of Maldives as well as industry related products such as kitchenware and more from domestic

and international suppliers and manufacturers.

Visitors to the stalls further stand the chance to win special and grand prizes with lucky draws held by the exhibitors. Attracting attendees from resorts, hotels, guest houses, liveaboards, restaurant and foodservice operators, foodservice consultants, exporters / importers and more, Food & Beverage Show will feature special activities such as a Pizza Eating Competition, cooking masterclasses and Cake Decorating competitions, panel discussions and more.

Organizer of the event, Highrise Pvt Ltd boasts over 15 years of industry expertise and a team of in-house event



specialists dedicated to creating extraordinary experiences. Their passion and dedication have propelled the Food & Beverage Show to its current status as the go-to platform for discovering the latest trends and innovations in the world of gastronomy.

The organizers extend a warm invitation

to culinary enthusiasts, professional chefs, food business owners, and anyone passionate about the realm of food and beverages to visit. The Food & Beverage Show 2025 provides a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the finest flavors, explore innovative products, and connect with current industry leaders.

IN THE NEWS

Soneva Namoonaa and Island Councils Celebrate 6 Years of Environmental Impact in the Maldives



Soneva Namoonaa, a local NGO pioneering innovative waste management solutions, and representatives from eleven councils from Baa and Noonu atolls gathered at Soneva Fushi to celebrate 6 years of delivering positive environmental outcomes in the Maldives.

The collaborative efforts between Soneva Namoonaa and the councils have created pathbreaking solutions for sustainable waste management on the island level and reduced harmful activities such as the open burning of garbage.

Over the past 6 years, Soneva Namoonaa has developed flagship programs to encourage the use of alternatives to single-use plastics, a 5-step sustainable waste management model and programs which inspire the love for the ocean.

With the councils and partners, Soneva Namoonaa has:

- Eliminated 1 million Single Use Plastic bottles from entering the ocean or being burnt, by producing and distributing 500,000 litres of Soneva Water, which comes in reusable glass bottles or large, reusable plastic containers.
- Diverted over eight hundred tons of waste from entering the ocean or being burnt by providing infrastructure, logistics and consultancy in Baa and Noonu Atoll.
- Five hundred tons of materials were sent for recycling, showcasing communities' dedication and willingness to adopt sustainable waste practices
- Engaged more than 6,000 people to promote sustainable behaviour change and environmental stewardship through various training and engagements.

Gordon Jackson, a Namoonaa Champion who has been working on innovative waste management solutions in the

Maldives for over 12 years, remarked: "Our partnerships with island councils have resulted in many innovative practices which work well in our small island context. The formalization of these practices through a model or framework for sustainable waste management is a great collective achievement."

Ibrahim Abdul Rahman, Vice President of the Baa Atoll Council and President of the Kendhoo Island Council, reflected on the transformation: "Waste management was once a low priority. But over the past six years, with Soneva Namoonaa's incredible support, we've achieved progress far beyond what we imagined. Together, we've demonstrated a blueprint for sustainable waste management practices across the Maldives."

Dhimsha Abdul Majeed, an island council member from N. Kudafari, emphasized the need for a national rollout: "To maximize the impact of government investments in waste management and elevate the nation's practices to a truly sustainable standard, I strongly call upon the current administration to adopt and implement the Namoonaa Sustainable Waste Management Model across all Maldivian islands. This model offers a practical and proven pathway to achieving long-term environmental resilience."

Azhoora Ahmed, who has been part of Soneva Namoonaa since its inception and is its current President reflected on the organization's journey and aspirations: "In 2025, Soneva Namoonaa is committed to embarking on an ambitious journey to scale its impact across Maldives. We invite the government, private sector and like-minded organizations to join us in creating a future where sustainable waste management becomes a nationwide reality."

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IN THE NEWS

Maldives Welcomes First Cruise Ship Visit After Regulatory Reforms

The Maldives has welcomed the Italian-aggged cruise ship AIDA carrying 2,139 tourists. The vessel, which is operated for Swiss, Austrian, and German visitors, arrived in the Maldives from Muscat, Oman, on December 8, 2024. This marks the first cruise ship visit to the nation since the regulatory changes initiated at the request of the Maldives Association of Yacht Agents (MAYA).

The AIDA's arrival is expected to provide a considerable boost to the local economy. The influx of visitors will positively impact a wide range of local businesses, including restaurants, souvenir shops, local dhonis, guest

houses, and retail outlets in Malé and Hulhumalé. This surge in tourism is anticipated to contribute significantly to the growth of the sector, enhancing the Maldives' reputation as a premier cruise destination in the region.

The arrival of AIDA highlights the Maldives' continuous efforts to expand and diversify our tourism offerings. In addition to strengthening the local economy, this development is also set to enhance foreign reserves, contributing to the overall economic growth of the country. The vessel is scheduled to depart the Maldives on December 9, 2024, at 6 PM, following its brief but impactful stop.



The Maldives' tourism sector continues to thrive despite global challenges. This milestone comes on the heels of the Maldives' recent achievements, including being named the WTA's World's Leading Destination for the fifth consecutive year

and the World's Leading Green Destination for the first time. This new chapter in cruise tourism sets the stage for future visits, further boosting the industry and positively impacting the local economy.

SriLankan Airlines' Mumbai Team Completes Agents' Educational Tour to Gan Island and Canareef



In an effort to showcase the beauty of the Maldives and promote Gan Island as a must-visit destination, SriLankan Airlines' Mumbai team, in collaboration with the airline's Maldives team and Canareef Resort Maldives, recently

hosted an enriching educational tour. The tour, which focused on offering travel agents firsthand experience, took place on the picturesque Gan Island, known for its breathtaking marine life and rich heritage.

This exclusive tour welcomed eight prominent tour operators from Mumbai and Pune, who were treated to a stay in Canareef Resort Maldives' Premium Beach Villas. Set against the backdrop of turquoise waters and white sandy beaches, the resort offered a unique experience that highlighted the island's peaceful ambiance and vibrant local culture. Gan Island, often celebrated as a diver's paradise, is becoming increasingly popular among families looking for a blend of relaxation, adventure, and cultural exploration.

The educational tour was a resounding success, allowing the agents to familiarize themselves with the Maldives' diverse offerings. From thrilling water sports activities to enjoying traditional Maldivian hospitality, the agents were given a comprehensive insight into what makes the Maldives, especially Gan Island, an ideal vacation destination for

both adventure seekers and those in search of a peaceful retreat.

SriLankan Airlines, with its strong presence in the Maldives, continues to strengthen its ties with the travel community through initiatives like this, ensuring that tour operators are well-equipped to recommend and promote the region to travelers. The tour not only enhanced the agents' knowledge of Gan Island but also highlighted the exceptional offerings of Canareef Resort Maldives as a key player in the Maldives' hospitality sector.

With this successful educational tour, SriLankan Airlines and Canareef Resort Maldives have reinforced their commitment to creating lasting memories for travelers, as well as supporting the growth of Maldives tourism as an increasingly sought-after destination.

New Damselfish Species Discovered in Maldives' Deep-Sea Coral Reefs

A new species of damselfish has been discovered in the deep-sea coral reefs of the Maldives. Scientifically named Chromis abadhah, this species has been recorded across eight different locations, spanning a 180-kilometer stretch of the archipelago, from Lhaviyani Atoll to Dhaalu Atoll. The discovery of this new fish species adds to the Maldives' rich marine biodiversity and highlights the importance of protecting its fragile underwater ecosystems.

The Marine Research Institute, which made the discovery, revealed that Chromis abadhah is likely to be found in other regions of the Maldives as well.

Researchers conducted extensive surveys, finding the species at depths ranging from 95 to 110 meters, where it thrives among the coral reefs. The fish has been observed to grow up to 6.9 cm in length, with four specimens captured and analyzed using specialized nets. These specimens provided vital data about the species' behavior, habitat, and ecological role in the region's coral ecosystems.

The discovery of Chromis abadhah is significant for marine science, as the species has never been recorded in any other part of the world. This makes it a unique addition to both the biodiversity of

the Maldives and the global catalog of marine species. The new findings underscore the importance of continued exploration and study of the deep-sea environments, which remain some of the least understood and most ecologically important areas of our planet.

According to the Marine Research Institute, this discovery emphasizes the need for increased conservation efforts to preserve the delicate ecosystems in which these species live. Coral reefs, particularly those in deeper waters, are often overlooked in conservation strategies, even though they support a vast range of marine life. The



discovery of Chromis abadhah serves as a reminder of the hidden biodiversity that remains to be uncovered in the deep-sea ecosystems of the Maldives and other regions around the world.

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BON APPÉTIT

Duck Leg Confit

Chinese yellow noodles, Khao soy sauce



Born in Haute Savoie, France, Chef Michel Muffat began his culinary journey early, attending the Hotel School of Thonon les Bains in 1979. With a passion for culinary mastery and global exploration, Michel traveled through France, Switzerland, Portugal, England, Korea, and Thailand, gathering diverse culinary experiences that shape his philosophy today. Currently as Executive Chef at Kuramathi Maldives, he oversees nine à la carte restaurants, three buffets, and a bakery, offering a remarkable array of dishes reflecting his expertise and creativity. Michel's dedication to culinary excellence has made Kuramathi Maldives his home for two decades, enriching the island's dining scene and delighting guests with unforgettable experiences.

- INGRIDENTS :
- DUCK LEG CONFIT (recipe for 12 pieces)
- 12 pieces duck leg
 - 40 gr. salt
 - 8 gr. black pepper finely ground
 - 8 pinches of fresh thyme finely chopped.
 - 4 leaves of bay leaves finely chopped.
 - 4 pieces of garlic gloves finely chopped.
 - Duck fat around 40 gr. per duck leg

- METHOD:
- Day before:
- In a stainless-steel container Place the thighs side by side in a dish, open side up.
 - Sprinkle with salt, pepper, garlic, thyme, and bay leaf. Cover with cling film and leave 12 hours in a chiller.
- Day after:
- Pre heat the water with the thermocooking system at 90°C. With clean dry clothes, brush the excess seasoning on each duck leg. Put inside vacuum bag individually. Add 40 gr. duck fat in each bag. and seal well. Cook 6 hours with the thermocooking system. Cool immediately inside iced water. Ready to use

- INGRIDENTS :
- KHAO SOY CURRY PASTE
- 5 pcs dry red chili rehydrated in warm water
 - 20 gr. finely grated ginger
 - 10 gr. coriander root or coriander stems finely chopped
 - 70 gr. finely chopped onion
 - 10 gr. finely chopped garlic
 - 1 teaspoon turmeric powder
 - ½ teaspoon cumin powder
 - ½ teaspoon coriander powder
 - 1.5 teaspoon Thai yellow curry powder
 - Salt
- (Put all ingredients in a food processor and blend well until have a nice paste, ready to use.)

- INGRIDENTS :
- KHAO SOY SAUCE
- Half of the khao soy paste
 - Cooking oil
 - 120 gr. coconut milk
 - 240 gr. coconut cream
 - 1 teaspoon palm sugar
 - ½ teaspoon tamarind paste
 - Salt

- METHOD:
- In a pot heat cooking oil, add khao soy curry paste and stir well few minutes or until fragrant.
 - Add coconut milk and simmer for few minutes until very thick.
 - Add coconut cream. palm sugar. tamarind paste stir well and simmer few minutes.
 - Rectified seasoning and thickness (must have a texture like a thick cream soup).
 - Pass on fine strainer.
 - Ready to use.

- GARNISHING AND PLATING
- Put some yellow noodle inside deep fryer until golden brown colour.
 - Reheated in salted water the yellow noodles and put in the middle of a deep plate.
 - Add the crispy duck leg confit on top.
 - Arrange deep fry yellow noodles on top and garden cress, add the sauce all around.
 - Ready to serve.



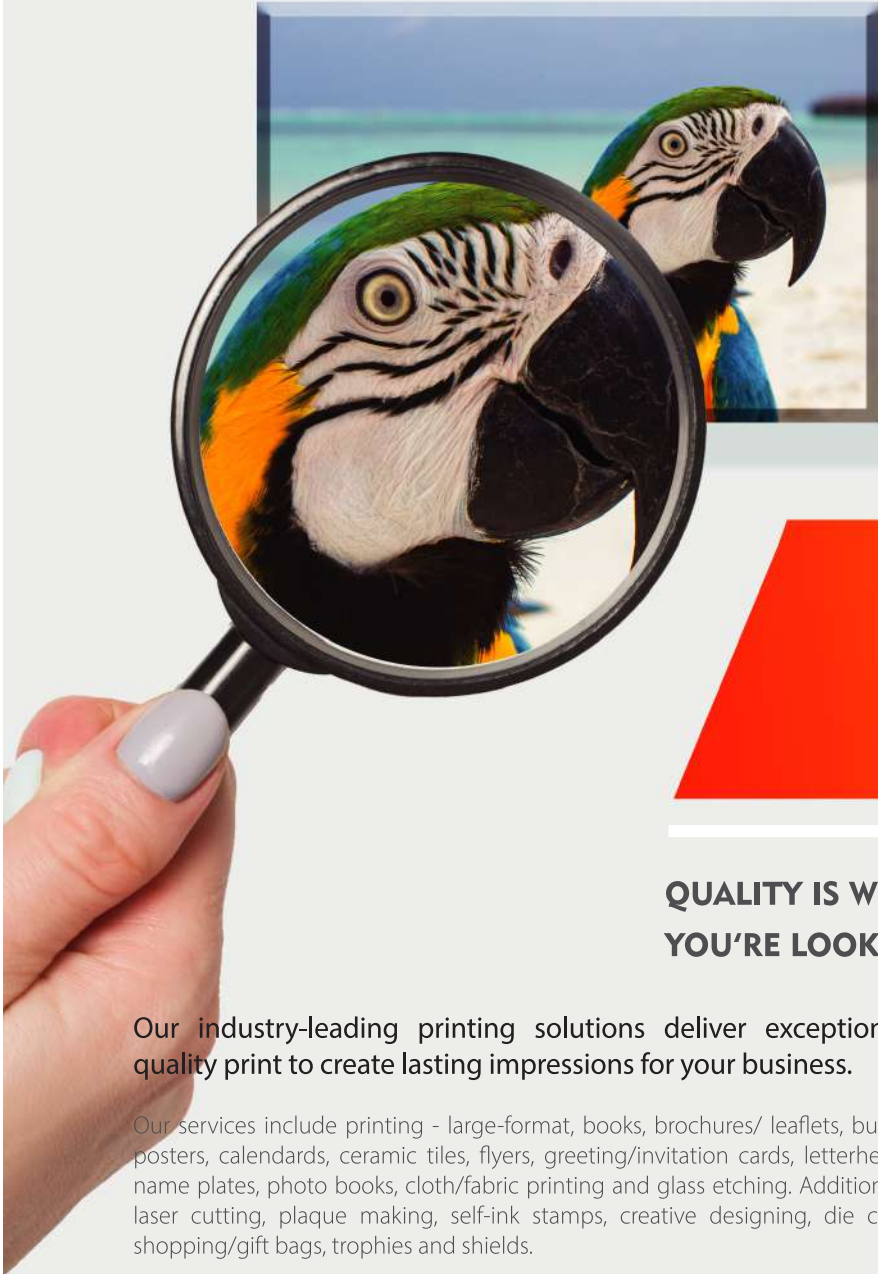
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Frankly Speaking

How do you anticipate the recent changes in the financial ecosystem of the Maldives will impact the tourism industry as we approach early 2025?



Rajeev Kohli
Joint Managing Director
Creative Travel , India

Yes, the frequent tax changes are a bit alarming. But given that Maldives is a higher value destination to begin with, I doubt if it will affect the purchasing decision of a traveler. Let's do the maths. On a 5 night stay, the green tax increase added USD 60 to the trip cost per couple. Let's assume two hotel levels - USD 500 a night and USD 1200 a night.

At the 1% increase in tax, the lower package will add USD 25 total for the couple. On the higher package, the 1% increase adds USD 60 per couple. So - increases of USD 85 to USD 120 is peanuts compared to the overall cost of the trip. The USD 20 pp on economy class passenger departures is not that much either. I don't think they should however differentiate on the departure tax by class of travel. That's discriminatory.

In our part of the world we like to get worked up about tax increases. Some angst is very valid. But when you do the maths and look at the bigger picture, a destination like the Maldives should not be worried. If this was India, yes, we would have a bigger issue. Our hotels are taxed at 18% to 28% depending on the service. So you have it far better then us. The Maldives does need to be careful though on not to over do it. There are limits of price elasticity in consumer buying. Don't push it.



Abdul Latheef
President
SEFM

The increased costs associated with higher taxes may deter visitors, leading to a decline in arrivals.

Tourism is a major contributor to the Maldives' GDP, downturn of that could have implications for economy hence policy refinements that balance fiscal needs with the sustainability of the tourism sector is needed with policy changes aimed to address economic challenges.

The actual impact will depend on how both the government and industry stakeholders respond to these developments.



Mohamed Firaq
Managing Director
Inner Maldives Holidays

We hope for the best, but I believe the government's real financial needs may not be fully resolved, which could lead to significant hiccups in revenue. Market forces suggest that there might be an initial drop in tourism activity due to recent changes in the financial ecosystem. However, with strong support from the industry, I expect the situation to stabilize and pick up over time. May be 18 to 30 months.

That said, the growing competition from other destinations offering similar experiences remains a challenge. Differentiation through innovation, sustainability, and value creation will be critical to maintaining our edge. The road ahead requires careful planning and collaboration to mitigate potential revenue shortfalls.



Ibrahim Ali Jaleel
Project Management Consultant

Raise in departure tax, green tax, and the Airport service charge may deter arrivals and harm economic growth, especially in the Guest House sector, as now a pair will pay USD184 or USD268 as taxes in addition to 17% TGST

The currency exchange of 20% or USD500 per head too will have an impact on the midscale and economy resorts and in GHs, as they will do 20% while luxury resorts can choose USD500 or 20%. (Should have gone for 20% which will be fair on all & would provide more foreign exchanges in the economy.



Donatella Telli
Managing Director
Albatros Top Boat

They will definitely have an impact because the increases are too many.

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