

# The islandchief

your trusted independent travel news

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It all starts with a  
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Maldives, the sun will shine again

**A MUSICAL ESCAPE with**  
**TOLGA UNAN**  
GENERAL MANAGER,  
HARD ROCK HOTEL MALDIVES

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PAGE: 12



Personality of the Month  
**DIANA SANTOS**  
Fitness Instructor,  
JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa

PAGE: 08



In the News  
**OOREDOO GROUP**  
Contributes to the Government of Maldives  
as Relief Aid for Covid-19 Crisis

PAGE: 16



In Conversation with  
**SONIKA ADLAKHA**  
Director of Sales and Marketing,  
Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort

PAGE: 18

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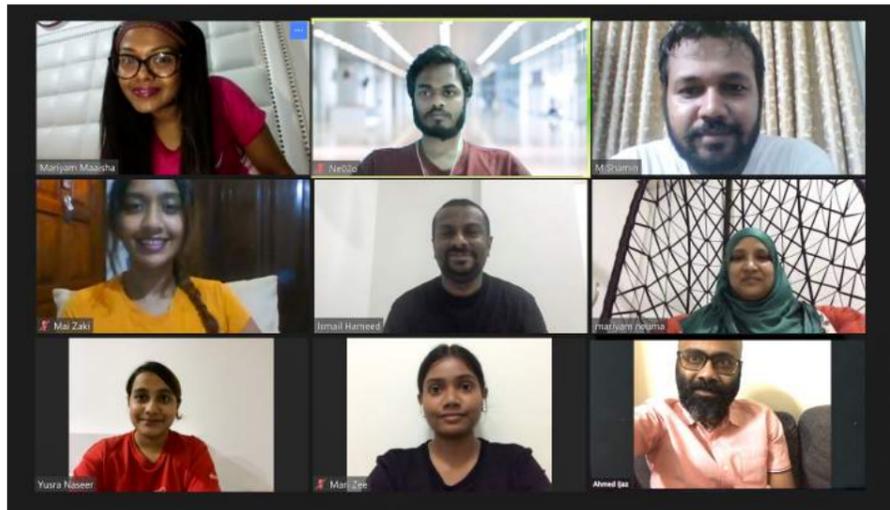
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Dear Readers,

*There is light at the end of the tunnel. It is not too bright quite yet, but we are at least beginning to talk about the when and how we will get back to normal. Like all crises of this magnitude, it will take time, patience, perseverance and an adjustment.*

*International borders are bound to open up, sooner rather than later. The global population's lockdown and confinement indoors is showing signs of easing. The Tourism Ministry issued a statement on Saturday, May 30, announcing its plans to reopen the country's borders for visitors in July 2020. The statement assured guests that they will not be charged any additional fees to enter the Maldives.*

*With lives and dreams battered down here since early January, the period till end of May has, and will continue to test the bonds between families, loved ones, and including one's sanity. This lockdown is not the 'break' we needed and it most certainly is not a 'break' in any other sense. We need a genuine respite, a reward and a clean slate. Rough patches and some turbulence may be experienced along this path of easing. Still, with well-defined protocols, including safe distancing and proactive cleaning, we will be able to see and experience freedom.*

*Tolga Unan, General Manager of Hard Rock Hotel Maldives gets the ball rolling with the beauty and serenity of the destination perfectly paired with the lifestyle and energy that only the Hard Rock brand can deliver. In this Exclusive Interview (p.12) he tells us about his career path in the travel industry and shares his views on technology and the brand's sustainability initiatives. This month, we even had the privilege of speaking with Sonika Adlakha, Director of Sales and Marketing at Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort (p.18), to gain some insight into what goes into the resort's secret formula.*

*Feel motivated as our Personality of the Month Diana Santos, Fitness Instructor at JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa, lets her personality shine as bright as the sun in this fun Q&A, where she also speaks to The islandchief about all-things fitness, health and nutrition (p.8). And, don't forget to head on all the way to the last page, to read the opinions of top industry stakeholders for this month's crucial question on Frankly Speaking (p.23).*

*Looking at that light at the end of the tunnel, although it will be a very gradual process, we know that we will eventually get there.*

*Until next month, happy reading.*

## DISTRIBUTION



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# Maldivian Arranges Repatriation Flight for Sri Lankan Nationals Stranded in Thailand

**Maldivian extends support in organising a repatriation flight for Sri Lankan nationals stranded in Thailand.**

A group of 69 Sri Lankan nationals including students stranded in different parts of Thailand for nearly 2 months, and several other individuals on humanitarian grounds were repatriated to Sri Lanka on a special Maldivian flight. Both Sri Lanka and the Maldives have shown immense unity in these challenging times by consistently supporting each other.

Maldivian stated via twitter: "We are happy and proud to extend our services as we navigate through these challenging times. Our teams remain dedicated to supporting and working with all amidst this pandemic."

Additionally, several repatriation operations have been carried out by Maldivian, reuniting migrants stranded in the Maldives with families back home.

Meanwhile, the national carrier has further been operating continued cargo flights bringing in vital goods from various nations in its continuous efforts to



provide assistance in transporting essential supplies and consumables to the local communities amidst the trying times of the global health crisis.

Maldivian's repatriation flight to Bangkok returned on the night of May 17, 2020 with 4,570 kilograms of cargo from Bangkok. During the operation, 58 Thai nationals were repatriated as well. The airline flew in an additional 9,158 kilograms of perishable goods from Colombo, Sri Lanka earlier that day.

In light of the current COVID-19 crisis in the country, Maldivian commenced cargo operations to various destinations including, Trivandrum and Chennai of India, Thailand, Dubai and Colombo. The airline previously stated that these successful freighters are a testament that their teams are focused on assuring the continuity of transportation of supplies smoothly to communities in the Maldives.

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## ACROSS THE SKIES

# Emirates SkyCargo Expands Global Network Across 75 Destinations

Emirates SkyCargo has expanded its weekly scheduled cargo flight operations to cover 75 destinations across six continents.

Through its wider reach, Emirates SkyCargo is able to transport essential commodities and other urgently needed cargo more rapidly across the world, allowing exporters and importers across markets to benefit from direct access to wide-body cargo capacity.

Some of the destinations recently included in Emirates SkyCargo's network include Colombo, Conakry, Dakar, Dhaka, Dublin, Khartoum, Kuala Lumpur, Perth and Quito.

In addition, Emirates SkyCargo has also upped frequency of flights to several key destinations such as Amsterdam, Beijing, Bengaluru, Brussels, Chennai, Chicago, Frankfurt, Hanoi, Johannesburg and London allowing businesses more choice and flexibility in having their cargo shipped to customers and supplementing additional cargo capacity for the transport of urgent and necessary goods. Over and above scheduled flight operations, Emirates SkyCargo also operates charter flights in response to customer demand.



Since March 2020, Emirates SkyCargo has played an important role globally in the transport of urgently required medical supplies including personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves, pharmaceuticals, healthcare equipment, electronics such as laptops and mobile phones as more people

around the world have turned to online working and learning, as well as food items including fruits, vegetables, sea food and meat. The carrier operated over 2,500 flights in the month of April. Currently Emirates SkyCargo is operating more than 100 flights a day from its hub in Dubai.

# IATA: International Air Travel May Not Exceed 2019 Levels Until 2023



**The International Air Transport Association (IATA), the biggest trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 290 airlines or 82% of total air traffic, has said that international travel is unlikely to be fully recover until 2023.**

Until a vaccine can be produced and administered, international travel reaching the same levels as 2019 is highly unlikely, according to the association. Even after a vaccine is widely available, IATA states that trust in international travel is going to take years to rehabilitate, which means

airlines will be forced to charter fewer planes.

Some international trips may resume next year, most likely for professional or essential reasons, as IATA believes quarantine measures on arrival would further damage confidence in air travel.

The organisation stated that a risk-based, layered approach of globally harmonized biosecurity measures is critical for the industry restart. IATA strongly urges governments to find alternatives to maintaining or introducing arrival quarantine measures as part of post-pandemic travel restrictions.

IATA's baseline scenario forecasts that as international markets open and economies recover, there will be further growth in air travel from the 2020 low point.

"Major stimulus from governments combined with liquidity injections by central banks will boost the economic recovery once the pandemic is under control. But rebuilding passenger confidence will take longer. And even then, individual and corporate travellers are likely to carefully manage travel spend and stay closer to home," said Alexandre de Juniac, IATA's Director General and CEO.

The news for domestic travel, however, is more hopeful, as when the recovery

begins, it is expected to be led by domestic travel and, according to the organisation, is expected to resume to almost normal levels by the end of this year. An IATA survey of recent air travellers conducted in April 2020 found that 58% are somewhat or very likely to restrict their initial travel to domestic journeys.

Domestic Revenue Passenger Kilometers (RPKs) will only recover to 2019 levels by 2022, with international RPKs only expected to return to 2019 levels in 2024.

"The impacts of the crisis on long-haul travel will be much more severe and of a longer duration than what is expected in domestic markets. This makes globally agreed and implemented biosecurity standards for the travel process all the more critical. We have a small window to avoid the consequences of uncoordinated unilateral measures that marked the post-9/11 period. We must act fast," said Alexandre de Juniac.

NEW OPENINGS

# Newly Built Cocogiri Island Resort to Welcome Guests in December 2020



The newly built and luxurious Cocogiri Island Resort situated in Vaavu Atoll, Maldives, will be opening their shores and welcoming their very first guests on December 1, 2020

Cocogiri is an exclusive, boutique, island resort featuring 20 water villas and 20 beach villas on a private island ensuring the utmost tranquillity for guests. A perfect setting for relaxation, exploration and rejuvenation.

Promising to provide unmatched luxurious experiences, guests can relax at the resort's swimming pool, take a dip in the crystal-clear ocean, sunbathe on the powdery white beaches or enjoy the serenity of Cocogiri's spa and wellness centre.

Guests can also enjoy their evenings watching the colours of the sky turn to magic as the sun goes down while feasting on a fantastic dinner at the

beach restaurant, with a range of international cuisine made by a highly experienced team of chefs, after which, guests can head on over to cool off at the bar.

For the more adventurous guests, the island offers the opportunity to scuba dive and snorkel with the on-island dive school, guiding guests through some of the most majestic coral reefs of the Maldives, or get that adrenaline pumping with the exciting and fun-filled water sports programme.

Additionally, through the daily excursions offered, guests can explore the surrounding islands and immerse themselves in the cultural beauty of the Maldives.

A personal gateway to tropical paradise, Cocogiri is only a 12-minute air-taxi or a 60-minute speedboat ride away from Velana International Airport. Regardless of the occasion, Cocogiri Island Resort offers the perfect setting for rare moments of romance, adventure, excitement and memories to last a lifetime.

The announcement takes place during the unprecedented closing of Maldives, and many more country-borders globally, restricting entry during the world-pandemic. However, the government of Maldives eases the nation into the world's new normal, with hopes of reopening borders for tourism in July 2020.



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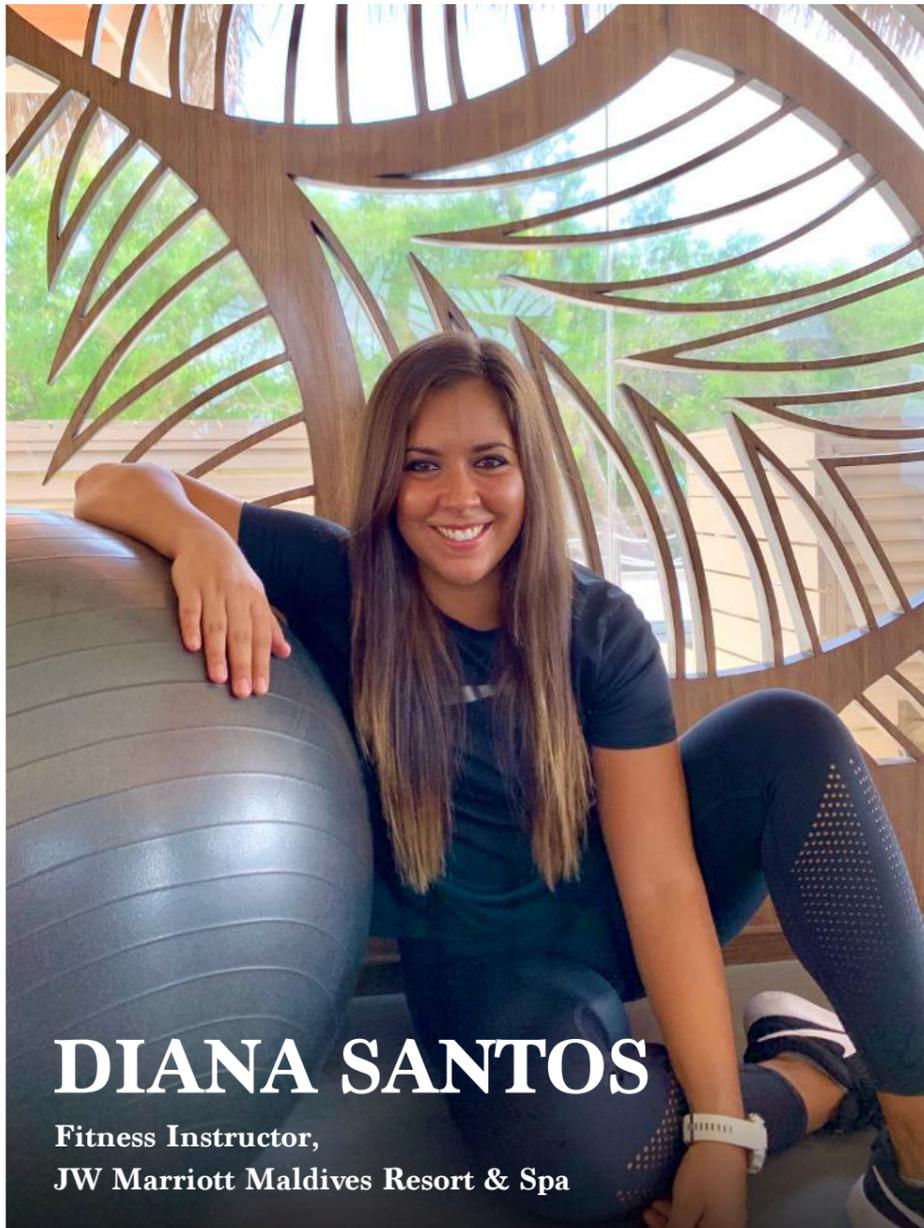
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# Personality of the Month



## DIANA SANTOS

Fitness Instructor,  
JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa

### How are you finding Maldives?

Maldives is a little piece of heaven. I remember a couple of years ago I wished to stay in a calm and beautiful place with a room by the beach and the ocean as my backyard garden. I'm excited that finally, I can fulfil my dream of living in such a beautiful country. Maldives is not only about the mesmerizing landscape; it's also about the warm and friendly people, especially the people that I'm working with at JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa. They're more than colleagues to me; they're my family away from home. Maldives has completely exceeded my expectations.

### What's your favourite spot at the resort and why?

My favourite spot here at the resort is our Yoga Pavilion. Every morning, after I complete my morning assignments and before the sunrise, I like to spend a few minutes in our Yoga Pavilion. These few minutes which I call "my meditative time" involve listening to the sound of the waves, feeling the wind and the first sunbeams touching my face and searching for my dolphin friends which most of the time can be seen in the outside reef of our overwater villas. It's such a revitalizing moment, and a perfect way to start the day with positive vibes!

### What do you most like, and dislike, about your field of work?

I'm lucky enough to declare that my job is my life. I love everything related to fitness and wellness. What I like the most is the connection with people, which I find in our daily complimentary classes as well as personal training sessions that we offer here at the resort. In these classes, I am able to provide our guests with guidelines to do the exercises by themselves when they return home. I love to see the expressions of happiness and satisfaction in their eyes after the sessions. It fulfils my heart and reminds me why I chose this field.

Another remarkable thing in my field of work at this moment is the chance to grow professionally. JW Marriott Maldives offered me the opportunity to take the Holistic Nutritional Certification Course. I'm completely amazed and grateful for this opportunity, as I had been wanting to be certified in Holistic Nutrition to enhance my career in fitness & wellness. I want to be able to provide our guests with the most complete, personalised and professional service. I want to coach them to accomplish their goals in a healthier way. Provide them with exceptional life quality!

There is nothing that I dislike, I may find some things challenging at times but I love challenges. After all, challenges take you out of your comfort zone and help you grow as a person.

### Fuelling your body through workouts and living lean takes work. What's your typical meal plan?

As I'm very active, I try to be mindful about what I eat in order to get the right balance of nutrients, vitamins and minerals that I need. I like to start my day with oatmeal so I start my day full of energy. For my main meals, I fill my plate with vegetables (full of minerals and vitamins), and then complete it with a portion of whole grains (fibre for a healthy bowel), a portion of protein which is most of the time plant protein or fish (amino acids for muscle support) and some good fat (olive oil, coconut oil). I like to follow a plant-based diet, in which most of my food comes from plants and less from animal sources.

### If you could change just ONE thing in your life, what would it be?

I would not change anything! Everything that I've been through made me the person that I am today. All the moments and experiences - whether they were good or bad, they all made me grow stronger and have shaped me as a person. If I could change one small thing it would be for my family in Portugal to be here in the Maldives with me and for them to see the beauty of the Maldives up close.

### What's your favourite "healthy" treat?

Without a doubt it has to be dark chocolate. Not only is it tasty, but also



Diana at JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa's Fitness Centre

it has many health benefits. Dark chocolate is rich in fibre and minerals, a powerful source of antioxidants, helps boost endorphins and mood, and contains healthy fat.

### Who are you listening to at the moment?

I like all types of music; it just depends on my mood and the time of day. For instance, I like to start my day with energetic music like Maroon 5 to get my body moving. While I'm at the gym, I go for electronic and motivational style music to get some extra power. At the beach, I like to listen to more "easy going" music such as Lauryn Hill, Macy Gray, Nina Simone.

### My mantra:

**Eat healthy, exercise daily, work hard, share love, be simple! These are my beliefs.**



Diana taking a moment to enjoy some meditative time at her favourite spot, JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa's Yoga Pavilion

# Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts Introduces Enhanced Health and Safety Programme ‘Lead With Care’ In Collaboration with Johns Hopkins Medicine International

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, the world’s leading luxury hospitality company, has entered into a collaboration with John Hopkins Medicine International, the global division of health care and research leader to validate its new global health and safety program, ‘Lead With Care’, and provide ongoing, real-time guidance on the evolving COVID-19 situation.

Grounded in the principles of care, trust and service, the Lead With Care program will be reviewed and validated by Johns Hopkins Medicine experts and implemented by dedicated teams at Four Seasons properties around the world.

“Within this new environment, our singular goal is to provide guests, residents and employees with the confidence and assurance that their health and safety is our first priority,” says John Davison President and Chief Executive Officer, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. “We are incredibly proud to work alongside the renowned experts at Johns Hopkins Medicine



International, leveraging their global expertise to strengthen our already stringent health and safety measures through our new Lead With Care program.”

Davison continued, “This new program is about offering genuine care and the highest levels of service, enhancing procedures to protect our guests, residents and employees, while also ensuring that they feel safe and reassured.”

A dedicated COVID-19 Advisory Board established by Johns Hopkins Medicine International and Four Seasons will create, enhance and review current procedures, along with virtual and in-person training to guide implementation of Lead With Care across Four Seasons global portfolio.

Grounded in health care expertise and enabled by access to leading technologies and tools, the Lead With Care program will focus on providing

care, confidence and comfort to all Four Seasons guests, employees and residents within the new COVID-19 environment. The new program outlines clear procedures that educate and empower Four Seasons employees to take care of guests and each other.

“Along with already-commonplace measures such as more sanitizers, masks and heightened cleaning and hygiene, our collaboration with Johns Hopkins equips our property teams with access to leading international experts and real-time COVID-19 information, enhancing our tools and training to deliver an experience grounded in safety and trust,” says Christian Clerc President, Global Operations, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

“While the Four Seasons experience may look different in this new environment, it will ultimately feel the same – our dedicated people will continue to deliver the same intuitive service and personalised care for which Four Seasons is known and trusted for the world over,” he added.

## Additional details about the enhanced global health and safety program includes:

### Enhanced Cleanliness

- Each Four Seasons property appointing a Hygiene Officer focused on implementing enhancements to already stringent procedures;
- Rooms disinfected daily with EPA approved products and will have blacklight inspection by room attendants;
- Focused re-training programs for Housekeeping teams on all cleaning protocols are being implemented across the portfolio;
- Public areas cleaned hourly with extra attention to frequented areas including front desk counters and public restrooms;
- The COVID-19 Advisory Board exploring an array of options to equip properties with the latest tools and technology, including electrostatic spraying, ozone technology for air purification and/or UV technology for HVAC systems.

### Heightened Guest Safety and Comfort

- Lead With Care kits placed in each guest room providing masks, hand sanitizer and sanitization wipes, with additional masks supplied on demand;
- Social distancing measures embedded in all services for guest protection, including appropriately spaced fitness equipment, modified spa menu and services, contactless check-in and housekeeping services;
- Restaurants and bars may operate with reduced capacity to ensure adequate space and socially distant set-up;
- Nearly all restaurants providing a-la-carte service with digital menus wherever possible;
- In Room Dining offering contactless delivery outside guestrooms along with sustainable, single-use packaging;
- Four Seasons App and Chat providing guests with real-time, contactless interactions with employees from their own device on nine global platforms and in 100+ different languages.

### Empowered Employees

- Lead With Care training building on Four Seasons legendary service model and diligent attention to detail, ensuring Lead With Care procedures are delivered in a thoughtful, attentive manner that balances guest safety with personal reassurance and comfort;
- Training focused on educating and empowering employees to deliver the enhanced health and safety program with confidence, passing on this care to each and every guest and resident;
- The COVID-19 Advisory Board advising on the global training program for all employees including: ensuring employees have a well-informed understanding of the disease and its transmission, providing guidance on appropriate social distancing and use of personal protective equipment, as well as physical and mental health monitoring and support;
- Grounded in emotional intelligence, employees are undergoing behavioural training, ensuring empathetic, personalised care and connection are not lost in the absence of close contact and limited face to face interaction.

*Johns Hopkins Medicine International is the Johns Hopkins Medicine entity entrusted with global advancement of the mission: to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence in medical education, research and care.*

## IN A NUTSHELL

## Villa Hotels & Resorts Introduces 'CleanStay@Villa' Initiative



**Villa Hotels & Resorts has revealed enhanced health and safety measures will be implemented across all their properties under the CleanStay@Villa initiative.**

With post-pandemic travel to be highly focused on guests' health, and with the possible reopening of Maldivian borders, the initiative has been built upon the luxury hotel brand's existing high standards of hygiene, and designed under the guidance of the

brand's in-house health experts, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Maldives Health Protection Agency (HPA).

CleanStay@Villa will be reviewed regularly based on response from the

Group's travel partners and guests, in addition to the evolving industry standards.

Under the CleanStay@Villa initiative, the following SOPs will be issued for end-to-end hygiene checks from arrival, transfer to departure, with more to be added.

- Disinfect all exposed surfaces on lounges and transport facilities for arrival and departure.
- Check and log temperature for all guests and staff on arrival and departing.
- Identify high touch areas in guest villas and modify cleaning protocols to ensure that such areas are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Implement new staff hygiene standards, with mandated PPE measures.
- Apply stringent disinfecting measures for F&B, Spa, sports, and recreation facilities.

- Recommend social distancing between guests and staff
- Implement continuous staff training in hygiene and cleanliness standards and protocols
- Ensure resorts' medical clinics are housed with doctors and required facilities
- Use hospital-grade disinfectants in cleaning protocols
- In case of need, provide isolation rooms at each resort

A statement by Villa Hotels & Resorts read: "The health and safety of our guests have always been our priority. We have continuously maintained an excellent standard of hygiene in all our resorts. Given the impact of COVID-19, we have upgraded our standards to ensure the health and safety of guests throughout their experience in our resorts. When the Maldives re-opens for tourism, Villa Resorts will be providing guests with a renewed assurance of cleanliness and safety."

## LUX\* Resorts & Hotels Shows Appreciation to Healthcare Professionals in Maldives with Complimentary Stay

In appreciation of the Maldivian medical professionals' selfless dedication in fighting on the frontline during this challenging time, LUX\* Resorts & Hotels in the Maldives shows their gratitude to the local healthcare workers by giving a complimentary two-night stay on full board at either LUX\* South Ari Atoll Resort & Villas or LUX\* North Malé Atoll Resort & Villas, Maldives.

The public can pay tribute to a healthcare professional who had touched their life during this unprecedented crisis by sharing their stories of appreciation on their own Facebook profile, along with the hashtags #CollectivelyWeCare and #CollectivelyWeCareLSAA or #CollectivelyWeCareLNMA, including a picture of the medical worker and tagging the resort they wish to win a stay in for their nominee.

The post with the most likes will enable the nominated healthcare worker to redeem his or her stay for two adults on full board basis including domestic transfers, as soon as accessibility is re-established to the respective resorts. This campaign will end on June 3, 2020.

Additionally, LUX\* Resorts & Hotels will honour these two Healthcare Heroes by planting a coconut tree on World Environment Day (June 5) in their names to serve as permanent reminders of their service rendered during this unprecedented time.



"LUX\* Resorts & Hotels is incredibly grateful for the healthcare heroes around the world who show up every day to look after others. No gesture is enough to repay their selfless acts of service, however, we wish to do our bit to provide them with a well-deserved holiday so they can recuperate and rest," said John Rogers, General Manager of LUX\* North Malé Atoll Resort & Villas.

LUX\* Resorts & Hotels helps people to celebrate life by delivering consistently on the promise of a different kind of luxury; hospitality that is Lighter. Brighter. LUX\* stages exceptional experiences in different locales – whether on the Beach, in the City or in Nature – by banishing thoughtless patterns and being more simple, fresh and sensory for the benefit of all its guests.

## EVENTS &amp; AWARDS

# Maldives Nominated in Multiple Categories of Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards 2020

The Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation (MMPRC) shared that Maldives has been nominated in multiple categories of the 2020 Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards.



*MMPRC stated, "We are honoured by the recognition, particularly at this challenging time. We kindly ask that you vote and encourage your friends and colleagues to vote as well. You will find us in the categories of Countries and Islands and you will find many of our hotel and resort partners listed under the Hotels & Resorts category."*

*The number of Maldivian properties listed in the Readers' Choice Awards Survey reaches 74. To vote in all categories, visit <https://www.cntraveler.com/rca/vote>*

## The nominated properties in Maldives include:

- Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi
- Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa
- Soneva Jani
- Baros Maldives
- Constance Moofushi
- Constance Halaveli
- Cheval Blanc Randheli
- Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas
- Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Maldives
- Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
- COMO Maalifushi
- Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru
- Soneva Fushi
- Joali Maldives
- The St. Regis Maldives Vommuli Resort
- LUX\* North Male Atoll
- Naladhu Private Island Maldives
- Velaa Private Island
- Anantara Veli Maldives Resort
- One&Only Reethi Rah
- COMO Cocoa Island
- Anantara Dhigu Maldives Resort
- Niyama Private Islands Maldives
- Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa
- Kudadoo Private Island Maldives
- Vakkaru Maldives BAA ATOLL
- Amilla Fushi Maldives
- Six Senses Laamu
- Fairmont Maldives Sirru Fen Fushi
- Hurawalhi Island Resort
- The Residence Maldives
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- Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu
- Dusit Thani Maldives
- Angsana Ihuru
- Velassaru Maldives
- Loama Resort Maldives at Maamigili
- Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort
- Milaidhoo Island Maldives
- Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru
- Jumeirah Vittaveli
- Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa
- Four Seasons Private Island Maldives at Voavah
- PER AQUUM Huvafen Fushi
- Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi
- Ellaidhoo Maldives Resort
- J Resorts Alidhoo
- Island Hideaway at Dhonakulhi
- Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa Maldives
- Zitahli Resorts & Spa Kuda-Funafaru
- Coco Privé
- Taj Coral Reef Resort & Spa, Maldives
- Lux\* South Ari Atoll
- Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives
- Adaaran Select Meedhupparu
- Cinnamon Hakuraa Huraa Maldives
- Centara Ras Fushi Resort & Spa
- Traders Hotel Malé
- Kanuhura Maldives
- Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma
- Shangri-la Villingili Resort & Spa
- Banyan Tree Madivaru Maldives
- JA Manafaru

# A MUSICAL ESCAPE with TOLGA UNAN

GENERAL MANAGER – HARD ROCK HOTEL MALDIVES



 @unantolga

“  
*We use music  
to connect with people –  
music is our enabler and  
music unites people.*

*That’s how we do it  
at Hard Rock!*

”

Operating a Hard Rock Hotel in Maldives’ first integrated resort is no easy feat. But Tolga Unan, General Manager of Hard Rock Hotel Maldives gets the ball rolling with the beauty and serenity of the destination perfectly paired with the lifestyle and energy that only the Hard Rock brand can deliver. In this exclusive interview he tells us about his career path in the travel industry and shares his views on technology and the brand’s sustainability initiatives.

***Before joining the Hard Rock Hotel, you worked for InterContinental, Hilton and Banyan Tree, all trendy brands in the hospitality industry. What drew you to this genre of hotels, and what expertise do you need to cater to the hip and famous?***

Many people wouldn’t know this, but this is not my first time in Maldives. I was here back in 2002, or maybe 2003 for a brief period. I was working for Club Med at that time, and I had to oversee the Food and Beverage Department at two of their properties – Club Med Kani, which had just opened then, and Club Faru, which is now part of Hulhumale – so I have known Maldives from those years.

The early years of my career, I worked in the Caribbean and USA. I arrived in Asia with Club Med, and spent a few years in Indonesia and Malaysia. I then moved to Hilton to open their first resort

property in China at the Hainan Island, and soon moved up to the position of General Manager in Shanghai. I ended up spending seven years with Hilton and also did another resort opening with them in Beijing right before the Olympic Games. I then took a position at Banyan Tree, and afterwards, I was with the InterContinental brand where I was managing one of their biggest properties in China.

My experience in China was great, but after I had my daughter Anna Sofia, I was looking for a more natural setting. I was particularly looking for a resort which I could manage in Maldives. It was really the right timing for me because Anna Sofia was very young. So, my wife, Mariana and I wanted her to grow up in a more natural setting. Mariana is from Brazil and I am from Turkey. We both grew up

in nature and that's what we wanted for Anna Sofia as well.

We were at dinner discussing our next move, when I heard about the opening of Hard Rock Hotel in Maldives. I knew it was "now or never", so I immediately reached out to the Vice President of Hard Rock International for an interview. Few weeks later, I was confirmed for the job, and the following month, we packed up and moved to Bangkok, where the head office of the company that owns this development is, and I started working for the brand. It was relatively fast, and I’m glad I made this move because it was a very exciting venture.

It is true that a lot of celebrities come to Hard Rock Hotel, but then again, a lot of celebrities come to Maldives, right? So, the positioning of Hard Rock

Hotel Maldives is a little bit different. First of all, we classify ourselves as an entertainment company to start with, not as a hospitality company. Whether our guests are famous personalities or not, we treat everyone like friends and put people at ease in a matter of minutes. We strive to deliver authentic experiences that rock for everyone.

***What are your biggest takeaways from the hospitality industry? Tell us about the key issues that it's struggling with.***

Well, we have to look at it in two ways. Now, we are right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, this is our biggest struggle, so undoubtedly, we will have to look at the before and after of it. Right now, all our focus is on the safety and security of our team and guests, but once everything is put in place, we can tick this box, and all that's going to matter is how we engage with our guests. For me, the core of this business is always the human factor.

I pay particular attention to recruitment and hiring the right people for the right job, making sure the people that I put in place can play as a team, and independently. If you were to walk into my office, you'll see a large mural decoration on my wall with the words, "A man that wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back to the crowd". As the leader of the orchestra, your role is not to teach the violin player how to play the violin, your role is to inspire the violin player, and all other members of the orchestra to play the same melody in amazing harmony. At Hard Rock, we call our team 'band members'. We are the band, and we try to sound as one, with different band members playing different instruments.

That's how I like to focus. I spend a lot of time making sure that the connection among team members, between the team and the guests, and between department managers and team members are very transparent, so they can convey the message very clearly and with the right level of energy.

***How will integrated resorts improve the Maldives' tourism product? What are the niches the country needs to fill in order to present an even more attractive product to international visitors?***

I know Maldives from a decade and a half ago, and at that time it was a couples' destination, a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. Sure, there were a lot of wealthy repeat guests, but for the majority, Maldives was a place that you'd come for honeymoon, and that's how it was marketed.

What makes the integrated resort concept unique is that it allows so much more in terms of activities and entertainment compared to a typical Maldives resort where after a couple of days, you've done everything there is to do. We are able to offer so many different things under the same umbrella. We have two different hotel brands, we've got a Café del Mar, plus various renowned restaurant brands, the Maldives Discovery Centre which is almost like a museum, and we have lots of retail shops. I think

this is what has been missing in Maldives up until recent years. It even cracks open a window of opportunity for Maldives to compete with destinations like Bali and Phuket.

Play on Land provides many activities with our Body Rock fitness concept ranging from Jiu-Jitsu and Self-Defence to Boot Camp. Play on Air is our aerial acrobatics program, and we have one of the largest Dive & Water Sport Centres in the country for some Play on Water. Plus, with our Sound of your Stay program you can borrow a guitar and learn how to play, or take it to your room for a jam session - the list goes on. I'd like to think of it like this: Using Maldives as a backdrop, we designed lots of cool activities for people to come and experience in this beautiful location. We are in the business of "Experiential Tourism". We try to get our guests to come and stay with us, not only because it is beautiful, but also because there is a lot to do. You could buy an electric guitar and learn to play it in your living room, it's a great thing to experience and a fantastic skill to learn, but isn't it an even better experience when you're doing it on the terrace of your water villa? That's what creates an authentic experience that rocks!

We've had a few Brazilian beach football players and Capoeiristas, taking the beach experience to a whole new level. We hosted Brazilian week over here with beach football, beach volleyball, and even Capoeira classes. These are all things that anybody in a major city could do. Just get a gym

membership and learn Brazilian Capoeira or play volleyball. Undoubtedly these are very accessible. But when you do it in this beautiful lagoon, it's completely different.

***How is the 'Integrated Resort' concept received in the Maldives? Do people have enough understanding of what it actually involves?***

Well, there are few other resorts working under the same concept, but not at this scale. I mean, even our back-of-house area can accommodate about 800 staff. It is almost like a whole other resort just for the staff themselves, along with a gym, their private beach, recreational facilities, a football pitch, the mosque, you name it! Besides that, we have the largest laundry facility and the largest power house in the entire country - you'd have to see the scale of it just to believe it. Even our warehouse is the size of Walmart.

We also have a workshop dedicated purely to repairing and maintaining the buggies. There are over 160 buggies here so imagine, every day there are a few buggies being maintained. On top of that, we have over 500 bicycles and another workshop just for bicycle repairs.

The concept and scale of this operation creates a lot of advantages for us. We all tap into the same resources in a way. This is what makes it a bit different. It's a large-scale operation, and I think people understand the benefits of it.



**What do you think about the hospitality industry in the Maldives and how do you compete in today's market?**

I would like to think of it like this; when comparing vacation spots, at some point it comes down to the price, but we try not to compete solely from the price-perspective. Instead, we try to create additional value for our guests. Our magnitude as an integrated resort helps with that for sure.

We've got Ministry of Crab, Carne Diem, Nihombashi Blue; all three rated within the Top 50 Restaurants of Asia for the past six consecutive years – Dharshan Munidasa is an award-winning celebrity chef. And then of course, we have the Hard Rock Café where you know you'll get fantastic burgers. When you are a guest here, you are not at the mercy of just one Executive Chef or one Food & Beverage Manager, you have a variety of options to choose from.

Another point is that for the money spent on a family trip to the Maldives, we provide way more island-time compared to our competitors. I mean, we are just a fifteen-minute speedboat ride from the main airport. We try to create an environment that makes it as easy as possible for families with young children. We have excellent amenities for babies and toddlers separately and free, and lots of fantastic activities for the kids, all designed to provide that extra bit of comfort for parents. When you combine all these little factors together, I would like to believe that you get more island-time and value.

**Give us an idea of what your Rock Star Suite Experience is like. How many units are there, and who are the types of well-heeled folks that stay there?**

We have water villas, beach villas, water villas with a pool, water villas with two bedrooms, but we only have one Rock Star Suite – 450 square metres of pure pleasure. It is designed for a couple. It has a master bedroom and a very large living room with a glass-bottomed floor. It has an infinity pool and a tuk-tuk bar sitting on the deck. You can walk right in and make your own cocktails.

Inside, you'll find a jukebox with a fantastic collection of music, and your very own seahorse carousel. It has an 86-inch TV and a massive sound system. It's got lots of celebrity artwork, and it's just a playful experience. The suite is right at the end of the water villa jetty so it has one of the best views of the ocean. It also has a private bridge that links to the water villa next door, so in case guests come with the kids and nanny they could get the next room as well.

It is actually one of the rooms that we sell the most. In the past six months that we've operated, it had the highest number of bookings. It's in great demand, and although we've had a few musicians, rock stars and celebrities staying there, the people who come do not necessarily fall into that category. There are people who are just looking for a little bit of extra space and extra comfort, who like to come and stay there.



We've had guests who stayed there for like six to seven nights and just didn't want to come out. I mean we had to tell them, "Look at all the other things you can do at the resort! There's so much more!", but they were very content spending their days in the Rock Star Suite, having all their meals there and enjoying the experience.

**The brand is embarking on, or already midway through projects in international destinations such as Dublin, Budapest, Amsterdam, and Madrid. And then, the coronavirus-stricken economy has had a major effect on the hotel industry, especially so on upscale properties. How are you tackling to adjust to the downturn?**

It's no secret that the global tourism industry has been very badly affected. I think it is one of the worst affected industries during this COVID-19 downturn, but I am a believer that we will overcome this.

Particularly, with the new Safe & Sound measures that Hard Rock International has introduced, it's going to provide guests with trust in coming and staying at our properties.

After many days of this global lockdown, people are going to start travelling again and when they do, we just have to be ready to welcome them and make sure that we can provide the right level of engagement. At the end of the day, people will come if they're safe, but when they do come, they would want to have a good time. So, we need to make sure that we are ready to deliver these authentic

experiences that rock. We use music to connect with people – music is our enabler and music unites people. That's how we do it at Hard Rock. This is our Amplified Service.

It is not an easy road for our industry. We are all working very hard to adapt to the new norms, making sure that we can provide a seamless service, with the safety and security of our team members and our guests, under the guidance of the Ministry of Tourism. Plus, being an all-island country, we have an opportunity here. I think that Maldives is going to overcome this much faster than any other destination.

**In September 2018, Hard Rock International (HRI) began eliminating plastic straws from all its properties worldwide, in addition to the existing green initiatives at Hard Rock Cafe and Hard Rock Hotel & Casino locations globally. Aside from them, what other sustainable initiatives have you implemented at Hard Rock Hotel Maldives?**

A subject very dear to my heart. In fact, they did, yes. At Hard Rock Hotel, once a guest arrives and completes the check-in formalities at reception, we say that we have a gift for them, and we give them Green Flip Flops – a pair for each guest. Green Flip Flops is a Brazilian company that makes plant-based flip-flops, beautifully designed. We have seven different models for the ladies, five for gents, three for the kids, and of different sizes.

So, the guests pick up their free Green Flip Flops at the Rock Shop, and upon selecting their preferred

model, one of our band members at the Rock Shop talks about why we give them these specific flip-flops. We explain that this is part of our sustainability initiatives. They are 100% biodegradable, and it's a great brand. They are not branded as Hard Rock, because we are not in the flip-flop business, plus, the Green Flip Flops brand itself is doing such a fantastic job for the environment. We also tell our guests to take the flip-flops back with them, and to choose this brand if they ever want to buy a pair. We often find stray flip flops on the beach and in the ocean, but Green Flip Flops will not harm or pollute the environment.

Guests will also find a lot of sustainable amenities in their rooms. We don't provide disposable amenities. I would like to believe that the amenities we provide to our guests are designed to last longer. A good example is the "Bogobrush" – an environmentally-friendly toothbrush. I don't believe in providing a new toothbrush every time the bathroom is replenished. The Bogobrush can be used for three to four months. Each toothbrush is made of plants, and is biodegradable, it returns to the earth within a few months after being tossed out. I was actually lucky enough to meet the President of Maldives, and I gave him a Bogobrush. It's the same with all amenities, inside-out they are made from metal or wood and contain zero plastic. Also, all the sunscreen available here is completely coral-safe. Everything here is done in a way that will inspire guests to continue to save the earth in their daily lives after their trip to Maldives. This country is a great location to influence people to live a light sustainable life.

At Hard Rock Hotel Maldives, we have our sundown ritual every day, and one day of the week is dedicated to sustainable living, where I talk to guests about why these little actions matter.

We also have the Marine Discovery Centre where they teach our guests about the resort's conservation activities, like the Junior Coral Curator programme and a clownfish release initiative, while the Maldives

Discovery Centre showcases the culture of this captivating country.

So, you see, we are trying to create our own little ecosystem here. I think it is a good effort to do something right for the environment.

***The classic artwork, guitars and costumes – it's all a major part of Hard Rock Cafe. What exactly is the essence and concept behind it?***

We call them memorabilia at Hard Rock Hotel. And, we have been collectors of music and entertainment memorabilia for over 45 years. From the time Eric Clapton donated his red Fender guitar in 1979 to simply mark his seat at the original Hard Rock Café in London, the collection has grown to over 86,000 pieces worldwide – the largest collection of music memorabilia in the world.

These pieces are not just costumes or wall decorations. They mean something to many people, and allow us to start conversations with guests. Each item has a story behind it. At Hard Rock Hotel Maldives, one of the department heads on my team is the Vibe Manager, responsible for all the music at the hotel. He also gives memorabilia tours for the guests, sharing stories about each piece. At the front desk, there's a handwritten letter by Eric Clapton which I like very much, we have a Rolling Stones guitar at the Hard Rock Café, we have some pieces from Asian, European and American stars, from different decades, and different genres. These items are displayed at Hard Rock Cafés and Hotels around the world, and are rotated across Hard Rock locations every seven years.

I had the pleasure of seeing some unbelievable pieces. There's a rocking horse that belonged to Jimmy Hendrix, displayed at the Hard Rock Hotel in Orlando. Someone from India gifted this to him way before he gained fame. So, just imagine how many songs he must have composed in the same room as that rocking horse. I mean, how many songs has that rocking horse heard from the master himself! These stories are what make it great.



***That's a lot of Hurricanes! How do you think technology has changed the hospitality industry? What is Hard Rock doing to accommodate the future?***

I don't think it changes it, but undoubtedly it enhances the hospitality industry. Then again, I am an optimist and a firm believer that guest engagement is the key. Today, we engage with each other over smartphones and apps, in fact Hard Rock has its own app at our properties for guests to make special requests, obtain room service, chat with us and simply enjoy some rock-star-quality service all with the tap of a finger. This is something pretty standard across the hospitality industry these days.

Still, I think what really makes a difference is not the technology behind it – it's how you engage with guests, the tone you use, the interactions. Here, at Hard Rock, it's very lively with the music and with little more amplified energy compared with other brands. That's how we roll.



# Ooredoo's Strong Response to Covid-19 Crisis including 2.5 Million Rufiyaa Donation for Health Supplies, 50 Intubation Boxes and other Key Measures

As COVID-19 continues to impact communities and businesses around the world, Ooredoo has continued to support customers across its global footprint with both digital solutions and relief measures.

Ooredoo Maldives has undertaken several initiatives during the ongoing global pandemic to support communities and continues to work closely with the government of Maldives, HPA Maldives and other key stakeholders to support the nationwide awareness efforts regarding COVID-19.

On May 27, the company donated 50 Intubation Boxes to National Disaster Management Authority of Maldives to help protect healthcare workers during this COVID-19 global pandemic. The company believes that it is an utmost priority to implement safety measures and provide the healthcare workers the necessary tools to protect their lives.

Intubation boxes are a recently innovated transparent polycarbonate box that was designed in Taiwan to separate the nurses and physicians from the patient to reduce the risk of contracting the virus while performing

guidance of medical professionals from IGMH.

"There is no doubt in the importance of protecting the wellbeing of our service providers and healthcare workers who are risking their lives every day to keep our communities safe. It is our sincere hope that these Intubation Boxes will provide additional protection to the healthcare professionals who are at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 and allow them to feel safer while performing their duties. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Metal Signs for their proactive efforts in the development of the local design of the Intubation Box, and ensuring a seamless and timely production of the equipment in order to hand them over to hospitals as soon as possible." said the Acting Chief Commercial Officer, Hussain Niyaz.

Earlier this month, Ooredoo Group and Ooredoo Maldives contributed 2.5



m-Faisaa on the Ooredoo App. Launched last year, Ooredoo continued to provide this service and urged all customers to stay home and resort to digital services available. m-Faisaa also established partnerships with several foundations to enable customers to make donations to help a cause dear to them, including Cancer Society, Maldives Deaf Association, Kudakudhinge Hiya and Fiyavathi.

Ooredoo Maldives welcomes customers of all networks to use m-Faisaa services, including utility payments, order and pay for cooking gas, payments to restaurants & shops, money transfer to friends and family. M-Faisaa customers can now cash in to their digital wallets online via BML, SBI and MIB.

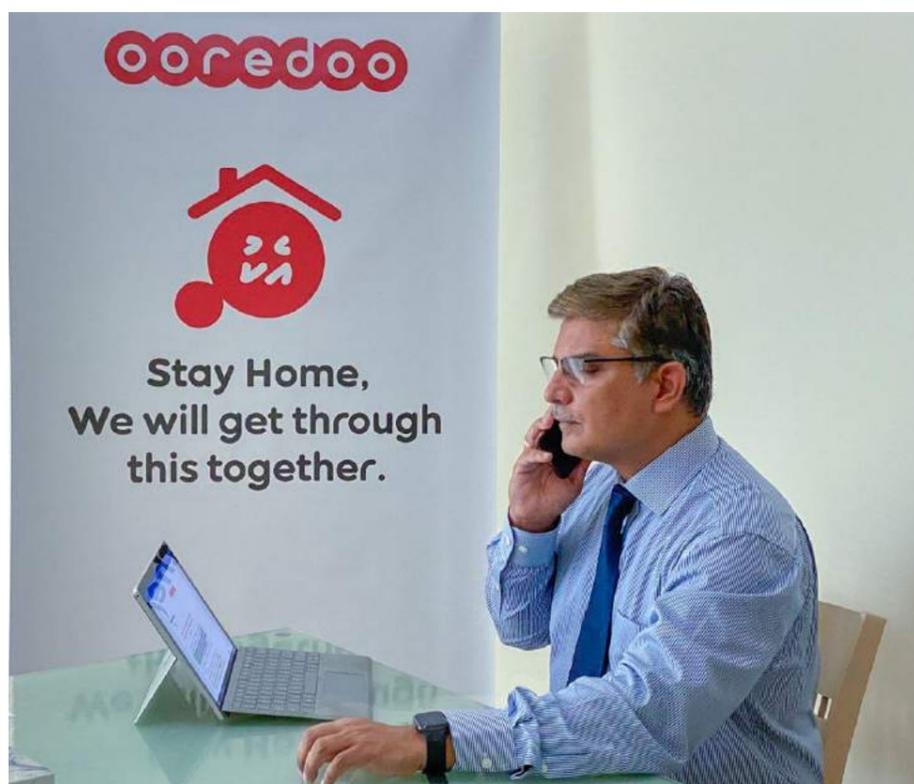
In addition to that, providers of essentials such as water, tuna and other groceries are turning to Moolee, Ooredoo's e-commerce platform, to reach out to customers online and facilitate deliveries to them. Moolee has been supporting businesses and enabling customers to shop from the comfort and safety of their homes, providing delivery of essential goods across Male' and Hulhumale' during the lockdown. The platform thrives in facilitating small business owners and online retailers reach a bigger customer base across Maldives. With provision of free warehouse space and delivery services Moolee expands your customer base from your base location to the whole nation. The service provides its consumers a seamless digital shopping experience with its services like online payments, free nationwide delivery, Easy Returns and genuine product availability for buyers to shop with confidence. Merchants looking to take their businesses online, can reach out to [moolee@ooredoo.mv](mailto:moolee@ooredoo.mv)

Furthermore, Ooredoo also announced a special offer on all OPPO devices with prices as low as MVR 2098.99 on Moolee. Customers can activate the special data offers or purchase the devices via Ooredoo App: <http://ore.do/app>

In an attempt to make Eid Al-Fitr more cheerful, colourful and connected, the company even hosted a digital music show, Ooredoo Eid Show 2020, featuring some incredible artists including Zakitte, Anya, Mira, Shammoon, Habeys Indi, Habeys Thola, Ibrahim Waheed – Bodube, and the local guitar legend Fasy Live, live from their homes. Ooredoo Eid Show 2020 was held on May 24 at 21.00 hrs live on Ooredoo Maldives YouTube Channel. Everyone was given the chance to enjoy great music and to have some fun interactions with the artists all from the safety and comfort of their homes. On the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, Ooredoo Maldives announced a special offer exclusively on Magey Plan of 3GB data valid for 3 days for only MVR 75. This special Eid offer enabled customers who had exhausted their allowance to stay connected and share the joy of this blessed occasion with their loved ones from their homes.

Ooredoo Maldives continues to extend generous offers with free Data and special payment plans to help customers stay connected with friends and family and to ensure accessibility to important information and news. For more information, visit

[www.ooredoo.mv/covid-19](http://www.ooredoo.mv/covid-19)



intubation for COVID-19 patients. Healthcare workers are at great risk of infection during the intubation procedure as the virus particles can get aerosolized when the tube is inserted into the trachea. Intubation procedure is usually performed by inserting a tube into the trachea to keep the airway open before connecting to a ventilator to help patients with difficulty in breathing. The Intubation Box design from Taiwan was further modified to create a local prototype for the Maldives by Metal Signs Private Limited, as per the

million Maldivian Rufiyaa to the Government of the Maldives as relief aid for the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, the company continues to provide critical connectivity support, mass awareness on COVID-19 prevention and relief, as well as digital solutions which enable online education, health services and enterprise.

Ooredoo Maldives also enabled customers to make their Zakat payments to the Islamic Ministry at the convenience of their homes via



IN THE NEWS

# Dhiraagu and Other Contributors extends support for MATATO-NBAM Food Programme in providing Morning Breakfast on the Occasion of Eid-Al-Fitr



Telecommunications and digital services provider in the Maldives, Dhiraagu along with Other Contributors have extended their support for the MATATO-NBAM Food Programme in providing morning breakfast on the Occasion of Eid-Al-Fitr. This programme was initiated and conducted by the Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators (MATATO) and the National Boating Association of Maldives (NBAM) in association with Male' Aerated Water Company (MAWC) - Coca Cola and Manta Air.

Eid-Al-Fitr is the first day of the Islamic month of Shawwal. It marks the end of the Holy month of Ramadan. Many Muslims attend communal prayers, listen to a khutba (sermon) and give zakat al-fitr (charity in the form of food) during Eid al-Fitr around the world.

All the key contributors who have been supporting this cause have extended their appreciation to MATATO, NBAM, MAWC - Coca Cola and Manta Air team for the humanitarian initiative amid this difficult time and stated that the companies will continue to support this programme.

Salsa Royal has been part of the programme by preparing the meals in the restaurant's main kitchen in Male'. Seagull Foods, Standard and Origin provided additional support to the initiative via in-kind contributions. Dedicated team of Manta Air assists in the daily transportation of meals to those in need.

The Food Support Programme initiated prior to Ramadan have delivered more than 28,000 meals till today for those in need. The team welcomes more contributions, well wishes and support for the cause.

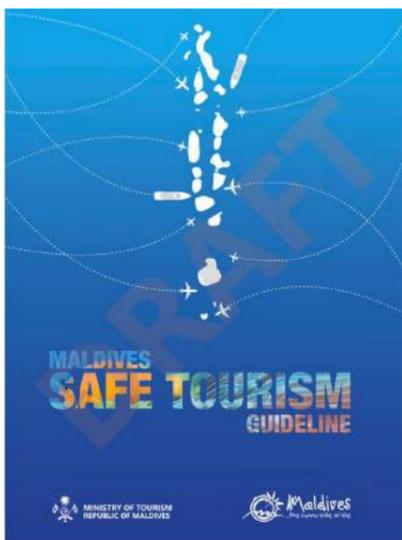
Donations can be made to the following accounts and confirmation slips may be shared via WhatsApp or Viber to (+960) 777 1893:

Account Name: MATATO RELIEF FUND  
Account Number MVR: 7730000319650  
Account Number USD: 7730000319651  
Bank: BANK OF MALDIVES

Account name: MATATO COVID FUND  
Account Number MVR: 1602011842  
Account Number USD: 1602011846  
Bank: COMMERCIAL BANK OF MALDIVES

For more information on the Food Support Programme please call :  
(+960) 777 1893 - Mr. Abdulla Suood, President of Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators (MATATO)

## Tourism Ministry Requests Industry Opinion for the First Draft of "Maldives Safe Tourism Guideline"



Minister of Tourism Hon. Ali Waheed has met with key industry organisations and authorities on Monday, May 18, 2020 via Zoom digital platform, where the first draft document of 'Maldives Safe Tourism Guidelines' prepared by the Ministry was circulated for the industry's opinion and comments.

The first draft has been widely circulated to all industry stakeholders and businesses with the support of organizations such as Guesthouse Association of Maldives (GAM), Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators (MATATO), Association of Travel Agents (ATA), National Boating Association of Maldives (NBAM), Divers Association of Maldives (DAM), Maldives Association of Yacht Agents (MAYA), and National Federation of Maldivian Employers (NFME).

While sharing opinions, MATATO President, Abdulla Suood stated that there are areas of concerns in the draft which will be shared with the members and reverted back to the Ministry.

NBAM President, Ahmed Afrah informed that the draft has been shared widely to the industry through various mediums, and the boating industry was requested to send in any comments before May 23, 2020. He further stated that NBAM will be

hosting an Executive Board meeting on May 21 to discuss the board's collective opinion, and that the proposed license fee in the draft may not be reasonable at all for boats, though they will be formally responding to the Ministry on the subject matter.

ATA President, Yoosuf Riffath said that it is beneficial to have the draft before finalising, and that there is demand for Maldivian Tourism stating that "together we must proceed fast and build confidence in the travel industry. No country can remain closed for long, as the battle against COVID-19 is right alongside the battle with the falling economy."

The Ministry of Tourism disseminated a press release on May 19, 2020, requesting industry stakeholders to send in comments and opinions before May 25 for the first draft of 'Maldives Safe Tourism Guideline'.

The meeting held on May 18, 2020 was participated by **Mr. Thoyyib Mohamed** (Managing Director, Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation - MMPRC), **Ms. Fathimath Afra** (Deputy Chief Marketing Officer, Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation - MMPRC), **Mr Ibrahim Shareef** (Board Member, Association of Travel Agents - ATA), **Mr. Moosa Nasih** (President, Guesthouse Association of Maldives - GAM), **Mr. Adam Ashraf** (President, Divers Association of Maldives - DAM), **Mr. Asad Ali** (Deputy Secretary General, Maldives Association of Tourism Industry - MATI), **Mr. Mohamed Ali Janah** (President, National Federation of Maldivian Employers - NFME), **Mr. Mohamed Nasheed** (President, Maldives Association of Yacht Agents - MAYA), and **Mr. Abdulla Ghiyas** (Vice President, Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators - MATATO). Other officials from Ministry of Tourism including **Mr. Hassan**, **Mr. Razzan**, Senior Policy Directors took part in the meeting initiated by **Minister Ali Waheed**.



## In Conversation with SONIKA ADLAKHA

DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING (DOSM),  
OUTRIGGER KONOTTA MALDIVES RESORT

**“It’s empowering, seeing women constantly pushing the boundaries to influence and seize the opportunity. I was fortunate early in my career to have mentors who really put me out there and let me do things the way I believed in.”**

Some properties are endowed with an innate ability to transport guests into a world of their own. Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort enjoys a remote location in the uncrowded Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll, less than 31 miles north of the Equator. Unlike many other Maldives resorts, where there are many other hotels nearby, and diving boats can often be seen sailing by, this resort feels totally undisturbed. This month we had the privilege of speaking with Sonika Adlakha, Director of Sales and Marketing at Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort, to gain some insight into what goes into the resort’s secret formula.

***Please tell us a few words about your career in the hospitality industry? How did it all begin?***

Travel runs in my DNA. So, when the time came to decide upon what I really want to do with my life, it’s no surprise that I chose the hospitality industry. It’s an alluring world of its own, with opulence one can only imagine. Where else can you romance with the sense of fascination, the scent of oven-fresh bread, the warmth of the ocean, the aromas of luxury, the cool breeze of style, the symphony of best in wine and dine and the everlasting affair with hospitality.

I started my journey from Housekeeping – climbing up the ladder to Front Office and eventually Sales & Marketing; moving from one department to another, diversifying across hotels and countries. For me personally, it still holds its charm, even after two decades.

***What’s your vision for the Outrigger brand and how do you ensure it stands out in a competitive marketplace like the Maldives, which is flooded with upscale properties?***

Preserving and cultivating the high standards of our products and services have always been a priority for us. It’s heartening to see our patrons reaching out to us during this sensitive time, reminding us of the remarkable and unforgettable experiences we helped them create at Outrigger, during their stay with us. Their constant support strengthens our beliefs and our dedication to help serve them better once we re-open.

We have always prioritized exclusivity, privacy and safety for our guests while ensuring they indulge in their intimate moments in the lap of luxury. Our villas offer space, privacy and luxury all clubbed at an unmatched price. To enhance their experience, we have in-room dining and tailor-made spa and yoga facilities upon request. Also, our culinary A la carte offerings ensure that each guest’s needs are catered to as per their palate and desire.

We are glad to be recognized for ensuring the highest levels of satisfaction for our guests along with our sustained commitment to nurture the world around us. Sustainability has always been at the heart of how we interact with the world. We strive for excellence in hospitality and commitment towards sustainability.

***The coronavirus pandemic has underscored Maldives’ tourism vulnerability. Do you believe in the need for a new "destination branding" that will focus on the recovery of the leisure tourism sector?***

The Coronavirus COVID-19 has brought an unprecedented amount of social, financial and political uncertainty around the world. And whenever there has been any global instability, tourism is always the first sector to get affected. Maldives is no exception; this is happening all around us. Thus far, it’s the worst anyone has experienced at such a global scale, as far as memory serves. Destination marketing services will see a drastic shift and strategies are being devised as we speak, to analyse and combat the situation at hand and roll the travel and hospitality industry back in to action. As an outcome of our continuous interactions with our partners around the globe, we are likely to roll out several new initiatives to begin the process of healing and recovery. The actual impact is still too early to predict and project upon; as of now everyone’s wellbeing is the only thing that matters. The recovery will be slow, but we are certain to bounce back, once the crisis eases.



Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort – Aerial view

**Many women in hospitality leadership roles struggle to achieve a work/life balance. How have you made it work for you?**

I personally feel that it's, more often than not, self-inflicted, and one needs to focus on the possibilities more than the roadblocks. It's empowering, seeing women constantly pushing the boundaries to influence and seize the opportunity. I was fortunate early in my career to have mentors who really put me out there and let me do things the way I believed in, which otherwise wouldn't have happened. I feel more than their faith in me, my self-belief accelerated my career and confidence tremendously.

However, old mindsets are yet to take a backseat when it comes to providing equal opportunities to women in leadership roles, especially in our industry. The challenges, more or less remain the same regardless of geography. Men are more mobile, more flexible with work hours, more accepted for their bluntness, more likely to give an instant yes, while women are "expected" to take a lot of factors into consideration before accepting or declining. In a lot of instances, in spite of giving in equal hours, women are "expected" to cater to all the household needs, while the same expectation doesn't imply to the man.

**During mid-March this year, Outrigger Hotels and Resorts launched a revitalised rewards programme, "Outrigger Expert Advisor", which offers several benefits to Australian agents. Do you see the programme open for agents outside Australia anytime soon?**

The Outrigger Expert Advisor — our revitalized agent reward system — offers multiple benefits for the worldwide agents of all Outrigger properties. Redesigned by our Hawaii-based Senior VP of Global Sales, Chris Riccardi, it now offers more value to our agents and simplifies the process of rewarding the longstanding loyalty and commitment Outrigger receives from the trade industry. Agents can become an Outrigger Expert Advisor by enrolling in an online course and once completed, they can earn unlimited reward points on Outrigger bookings through a wholesaler, GDS, phone or website, to redeem for accommodation at selected Outrigger properties. The new OEA program applies globally, not just within Australia.

**What challenges and opportunities face the brand regionally and globally?**

The challenges and opportunities of yesterday no longer hold any weightage in times to come. The leisure

and hospitality industry is facing the current dilemma as a family and everyone's equally impacted. Only once the situation starts melting, will we truly know what challenges one needs to prepare for and what opportunities one can seize.

Being a leisure resort brand, with all Outrigger properties located on tropical islands including Maldives, Mauritius, Hawaii, Fiji, Phuket, Koh Samui and Guam we also need to keep a tab on the crucial role our airline partners will play in times to come.

**There is a lot of buzz surrounding talent attrition emerging as a big problem. How do you look at it? What steps are you adopting to cater to the problem?**

It always hurts when talented people leave, but not always can it not be avoided. Employees are ready to hop, skip and jump to any hotel, sometimes just for meagre sums or titles, without taking into consideration the career growth prospects or the opportunities their current brand could offer in times to come. While, sometimes the lack of vision lies at the employee end, sometimes it's the senior leadership failing to communicate the same.

At Outrigger Konotta Maldives, we believe that communication is the key to growth and sustainability, as is training and development, ensuring retention with evolved engagement, accepting and embracing the new age values and work culture, transparent work culture, celebrating the cultural potpourri, career counselling, an open channel of communication and most importantly Z.T.P. (Zero Tolerance Policy). Our retention ratio is quite high and we also emphasize on working without local communities as part of our team and as well as third party.

**What will Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort's guests rave about to their family and friends?**

Ours is a story driven by an unceasing passion for customer service and satisfaction. And while we are truly blessed with a landscape that is unparalleled, we add value to the way people connect and engage with each other.

Over the years people have appreciated our efforts towards sustainability and our care for the environment and local communities. For our eye to anticipate the needs of our customers and to care for them. For our enviable sense of joie de vivre. For the extra mile we are willing to walk just to see that smile of customer satisfaction. For the breathtaking views. For the un-urban adventure. For our

personalized recreational activities (yoga and spa). For the sinful flavours (our a la carte preparations are a talk of the town). For an unforgettable tale of exceptional hospitality. For respecting and securing your privacy. For that personal touch. For the ultimate in luxury and hospitality.

**Three years ago, you unveiled the OZONE Hut - a homegrown initiative focusing on the property's efforts to spread awareness on environment conservation and preservation of marine life. Please tell us about the philosophy behind the Outrigger brand's focus on environmental sustainability?**

You can't really separate Sun, Sea, Sand and Sustainability. What a disaster it would be if the generations to come don't get to soak into this privilege that nature has bestowed upon us. At Outrigger we are extremely proud of the steps we have taken towards sustainable living and at the same time are geared up to advance those steps in years to come.

The sea is part of our DNA, and its stewardship is a responsibility we take seriously. Outrigger Konotta Maldives has unveiled the OZONE Hut, an initiative under its environment conservation and sustainability programmes.

Our OZONE (Outrigger's ZONE) conservation initiative was launched to protect our oceans and coral reef from unnatural damage and help them to thrive for generations to come. We are committed to marine education and conservation through various platforms.

Conceived under the OZONE initiative, the OZONE Hut is a homegrown project created to spread awareness on environment conservation, and especially on preservation of marine life. It's been built — using recycled materials like empty glass bottles, plywood and dried thatch from palm trees for the roofing — to organize environmental campaigns, host presentations on the importance of preserving our natural habitat and address similar causes. We have also been a serious advocate of sustainable diving and replanting corals.

**What advice can you give to other women aspiring to achieve leadership roles in the tourism and hospitality industry?**

Don't be scared to give things a go, as the fear of failure is just in your head. You are as good as the decision you make and the inputs you include before making them.



Sonika Adlakha (second from right) with her teammates at Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort

# 5 Tips to Holistic Wellness: At Home

By Crown & Champa Resorts



In a constantly changing and challenging world, it's increasingly difficult to live authentically, peacefully and happy. Increasing numbers of burnout and other stress symptoms are alarming. As Renate Hermes, certified Wellness & Transformation Coach, Group Spa Director and Co-Owner of Duniye Spa Group Maldives, says:

*"Life is not a straight line, but a wonderful meandering discovery of that powerful place within"*

Focusing on Wellness and the various ways to reconnect with yourself, the present moment and simple techniques to reinvigorate your sense of wonder, Crown & Champa Resorts and the Duniye Spa Group offer 5 Tips to Holistic Wellness while in the comfort of your own home and daily routine.

## Tip #5 Stay Hydrated

Staying hydrated is important in maintaining your wellbeing on a day-to-day level. 70% of the body is made up of water, which keeps the muscles and joints functioning, the brain protected, boosts your immune health, digestion, and even mood.

Set a goal for your daily amount of water intake and stick to it throughout the day, be it at the office with a special water bottle or at home, in between meals and snacks. Setting reminders or placing the water bottle where most visible can help keep you on track and hydrated each day.

## Tip #4 Take Time to Unplug

"Unplugging" from the Internet promotes, more than most in this electronic-era, mindfulness of the present moment. It allows you to pause, take in life as it happens and importantly, helps you develop an acute awareness of your own thoughts and feelings.

Choose a specific time and duration of the day to intentionally unplug and put away all electronic devices. This could be an hour before you start your day, allowing you to set the tone for your day or an hour before you sleep, allowing you to recap on your day, both promoting mindfulness.

## Tip #3 Mind What You Eat

Minding what you eat goes beyond diets. It includes learning the origin of the produce you eat, as well as really tasting the various flavor combinations in a meal. This promotes an awareness of your body and the "fuel" it needs to function in a busy world while highlighting what to increase or decrease.

Keep an eye on your organic and non-organic produce, as well as your processed and non-processed goods. Try to include as much plants to meals as possible, as these contain an array of enzymes, vitamins and minerals. A little-known secret is the benefits of the Indian herb, Turmeric. Used as a supplement, researchers have found that Turmeric can help restore memory, decrease inflammation and lower blood pressure among many other benefits.

## Tip #2 Move the Body Often

Sitting at your desk all day can decrease your blood flow and energy levels, cause back and hip problems and lowers the production of healthy antioxidants. Exercise, including regular stretching, promotes detoxification, oxygenates your cells and keeps your body alive.

Opt for a walk during your lunch break, or choose the staircase instead of the elevator to keep your body moving. These brief walks are just as helpful in keeping your body oxygenated and blood circulation flowing.

## Tip #1 Finding a Healthy Balance

The key to incorporating these for holistic wellness is to find the ideal balance for your lifestyle and wellness needs. Be it at home or on a well-deserved holiday, a healthy balance promotes inner and outer wellbeing, mindfulness, healthier relationships with loved ones and productivity.

With mindfulness and an awareness of what your body, mind and soul need as key ingredients, day-to-day tasks can be prioritized, filtered to provide more meaning and wellness. This includes social interactions, work projects; personal health and fitness routines; and meaningful relationships with loved ones.



MOVERS & SHAKERS

## Iain McCormack Appointed as General Manager at Vakkaru Maldives



**With a wealth of luxury hospitality experience, Iain McCormack has joined Vakkaru Maldives as General Manager, bringing over 36 years of hospitality industry experience.**

With his extensive knowledge and expertise from past experiences working in key global regions of hospitality business, McCormack is no stranger to the Maldives where he previously managed the property of Soneva Gili and more recently Fairmont Maldives, Sirru Fen Fushi.

A hotel management graduate of Southampton College, he started off his career working at several renowned hotels in the UK, including the Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland, and The Metropole Hotel in London. He made his next move to the Caribbean, where he managed luxury properties in the Grenadines, Barbados, St Lucia, Anguilla, Jamaica and

St. Maarten. He then moved to Soneva Gili (now Gili Lankanfushi) in the Maldives, before building on his experience with hotels in Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Bali. Through his career, McCormack spent extended periods of time in Asia working with international hospitality companies such as Leading Hotels of the World, IHG and Shangri-La. He also served as the Consultant General Manager at Naman Retreat, in Danang Vietnam, and as the General Manager at InterContinental Danang, Vietnam, contributing to the resort's multiple accolades, including winning "World's Leading Luxury Resort" in 2014 and 2015.

In 2017, he served as the Global Group Director of the Karma Group, an award-winning international travel and lifestyle hospitality brand. In his role, he had full strategic control of the group's 27 boutique and luxury resorts, including implementing brand standard systems, setting up structured sales and marketing

plans, and driving the development division.

McCormack joined the Fairmont Maldives Sirru Fen Fushi team in 2018 as General Manager where he spearheaded restructuring initiatives to improve the deliverables of various departments in the resort. During this time, McCormack brought major progress and improvements to the resort such as an increase in the total revenue by a whopping 97%, the GOP increased by \$3.9 million and he further strengthened the reputation performance rating score to 97% in addition to the many more accomplishments he achieved at Fairmont Maldives Sirru Fen Fushi.

With McCormack's rich multi-faceted experience in resorts worldwide and his passion for top-notch guest services, he is expected to play a key role in enriching the stellar reputation of the Vakkaru brand and positioning Vakkaru as the top luxury resort in the island nation.

## Murad Hassan Joins Villa Hotels and Resorts as Director of Business Development



**Bringing 17 years of successful experience in the area of hospitality and tourism marketing, Murad Hassan returns to Villa Hotels & Resorts as the Director of Business Development.**

Murad brings with him extensive sales and marketing experience and knowledge from the hospitality sector to Villa Hotels & Resorts, which will prove highly valuable for the luxury resort brand.

Murad started off his career working for the government of Maldives, before moving to the Maldives Tourism Promotion Board (now Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation, MMPRC), where he held Senior Marketing positions. He later joined Bandos Island Resort & Spa as Director of Sales & Marketing. Murad also previously worked with Villa Hotels & Resorts as Deputy Director of Sales & Marketing prior to his most recent 9-year-long experience at Agoda as the Director of Market Management (Malaysia & Maldives) where he built

a strong network of business relationships with various industry individuals to develop partnerships.

Villa Hotels & Resorts was established mainly for the purpose of managing and marketing the resorts owned and operated by the Villa Group of Companies. Currently, Villa Group owns and manages five exclusive island resorts which are amongst the finest in the Maldives, including Paradise Island Resort & Spa, Sun Island Resort & Spa, Royal Island Resort & Spa, Holiday Island Resort & Spa and Fun Island Resort & Spa. All Villa resorts are private, self-contained and offer services at the highest possible quality. Ranging from 3- to 5-star standard, these resorts have some of the widest choice of facilities in the Maldives.

## JOALI Maldives Appoints Ismail Nasheed as Resort Manager



**JOALI Maldives has promoted Ismail Nasheed, with over 19 years' experience, to the roll of Resort Manager, overseeing all operations of the luxury property.**

Ismail started off his career in 2001 as a receptionist at Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. Ismail excelled within the company for 13 years, holding a variety of managerial positions during the period. He then joined Anantara Hotels, Resorts and Spas in Doha, Qatar as Director of Guest Services and then Front Office Manager.

In March 2018, Ismail joined JOALI Maldives as Front Office Manager. During his time at the luxury resort, through hard work and dedication he was promoted to Rooms Division Manager, and then to his new role as Resort Manager.

Opened as the first art immersive luxury hotel in the region, JOALI offers unconventional luxury through the lens of the resort's "Joie de Vivre" philosophy, welcoming guests to celebrate the joy in every passing moment. The resort is located on its own private island in the picturesque Raa Atoll, which is a 45-minute seaplane ride to the island. Guests also have the option to transfer from Velana International Airport (VIA) to Ifuru Airport by a 45-minute domestic flight followed by a 25-minute speedboat ride to the resort.

BON APPÉTIT

## COCONUT ALMOND PLUM CAKE



Chef Giovanni De Ambrosis is an award-winning, progressive culinary professional with over 25 years of experience in world-class resorts, hotels and restaurants. He exemplifies professionalism and has the ability to drive clients' satisfaction and retention through the creation of quality food, while fostering a friendly and pleasant dining experience. With his extensive knowledge, he has strong business administrative insight, along with recruiting, training and interpersonal skills. A calm, pleasant and hardworking individual, he has proven his experience in international operations and has a history of providing support and leadership to kitchen staff. His natural ability to both, create an enthusiastic, productive working environment, and maintain a reputation of quality, service and dedication, has brought him to where he is today; The Ambassador of Italian Taste.

"A quick, gluten free and lactose free plum cake that you can add any topping to. In the last few years, I had been focused on healthy food, I had collaborated with many resorts and created healthy recipes to be able to accommodate any food intolerance needs. Coconut flour? Rigorously from our island coconuts!!" – Chef Giovanni De Ambrosis.

### Ingredients

- 5 eggs
- 200 gr sugar
- 1 cup corn oil
- 180 gr almond flour
- 70 gr coconut flour
- 10 gr baking powder
- 50 gr black raisin

### Method

- Whip eggs and sugar for a few minutes, add corn oil, gently add the almond and coconut flour and the remaining ingredients.
- Pour into a plum cake tray and bake for 40 minutes at 180 degrees.



*Courtesy of*  
**Chef Giovanni De Ambrosis**  
 Corporate Executive Chef  
 Cocoon Maldives



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# Frankly Speaking

**Slow tourism seems to offer an alternative to both the hurried traveller and to the sun, sand and sea mass tourism initiated in the 1960s in the Mediterranean. However, it also requires acceptance of a slow pace, and greater personal interaction with the locals and their culture. Is this a sustainable solution for the future of Maldives tourism?**



**Mohamed Ali**  
Chairman  
Moodhu Holidays



**Mohamed Khaleel**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Manta Air

We have seen a huge shift from the 'art of doing nothing' towards exploration and adventure. In the earlier days, our visitors chose to spend the entire holiday at the beach reading a book, or spending some quality time with their loved ones, without leaving the island even once. However, today a lot of travellers to the Maldives do enquire about the possibility of visiting nearby islands and many do not prefer to be on the same island for more than four to five days. The average stay has reduced from 14 days to less than 7 days in recent years. People do not want to be in one spot for too many days. The millennials have revolutionized our approach to what we offer. Yes, slow-paced, greater personal interaction with locals, and allowing our visitors to understand our culture would be a sustainable solution for the changing needs of visitors to the Maldives, the Sunny Side of Life.

For many countries, the pressure on governments to reopen their borders, societies and economies is intense: many are desperate to get back to work and re-establish some normality in their lives.

The main pre-requisite for opening the border will be that the government should have a credible strategy in place for proper screening at the airports and how to deal with positive cases when they encounter one, because they surely will. Putting entire islands under quarantine for weeks and trapping guests there will not be a solution. There has to be a strategy which builds confidence amongst the guests that Maldives is a safe destination, and that if something does happen, they will be looked after well. Just opening a small airport, ad hoc, for the sake of a few billionaires is not the solution. The government should focus on finding a solution quickly for the entire industry. We cannot afford to turn tourism off for the next 12 months.

The biggest driver will be the willingness of the source countries to allow their citizens to travel and return without having to go into quarantine back home. Giving confidence to those countries that Maldives has the situation under control is key. A proper Government-to-Government dialogue with the key source market is a pre-requisite.

When tourism returns, people's choice of destination will be driven by safety and hygiene, rather than who has the cheapest price. The industry must coordinate to avoid a race to the bottom and we should stagger the openings so that the full inventory doesn't come to the market at the same time. For this to happen the government needs to find a solution for those resorts and their staff who would delay their reopening.



**Abdul Latheef**  
President  
SME & Entrepreneurs  
Federation of Maldives

Exploring the concept based on slow tourism or hurried travels is not the best option for Maldives. Our environment and culture are also quite different from those based in the Mediterranean. Best for Maldives will be to continue the successful tourism that has been practiced here in the last 48 years.

If the concept upon which Resorts operate in Maldives is the same concept as skyscrapers operate at Washington DC or Tokyo, then it will be difficult for us to achieve success. We will be more successful if we sell our country's unique culture, nature, and ambiance. We should focus on being a destination that targets to provide affordable tourism for youth, honeymooners, and for those seeking a getaway for special travel and silver or golden jubilee anniversaries which in most cases are high-end resorts. By doing so, we can target to bring each person at least four times in their life to Maldives and become a destination that is good for all classes of people.

As this is an island nation which stretches over 1,129km and consist of 99% sea, starting the concept of regional airports will result in convenience for the wealthy and affordable to the price-conscious travelers. That will make everyone happy and Maldives remain a peaceful country which is ideal and safe for tourists.



**Mohamed Firaq**  
Managing Director  
Inner Maldives Holidays

Of course, slow tourism promises a more authentic travel experience, a greater consumption of local products, preservation of heritage, use of clean energy, an ethical vision of tourism, and a deeper concern for the ecology and for the quality of life of locals and visitors alike. Despite the traditional backpacking routes in destinations such as South East Asia, Central America or Australia – we have had visitors enjoying slow tourism in Maldives. From travelling for a prolonged period of time at a slow pace, whilst absorbing a deep, authentic and cultural experience.



PHOTOGRAPHY



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