



## Diving into Tomorrow

### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

with

### DUSAN RUNJAJIC

International Sales & Marketing Director  
Mares

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**Managing Editor**  
Mariyam Maaisha

**Management Team**  
Ismail Hameed  
Ismail Shifraz  
Mohamed Shamin

**Sales & Marketing**  
Mohamed Hassaan Ismail

**Finance & Accounts**  
Mariyam Niuma  
Yusra Naseer

**Consultant**  
Ahmed Ijaz

**Content Executive**  
Mariyam Zeena

**Cover Interview Photography**  
Photographer Zippo

**Design**  
Richard Mendonca, Flavours Inc.

**Web Development**  
Ahmed Fazeel  
Ibrahim Nisham (Paighde)

**Distribution**  
Shahid Uddin

**Website:**



Address:  
Maldives Publications Pvt Ltd  
Super Market Shopping Centre,  
6th Floor, Chaandhanee Magu,  
Male, 20189  
Maldives

Phone : +960 3307898  
Email : [sales@islandchief.com](mailto:sales@islandchief.com)

News & Press Releases to be shared by email to :  
[news@islandchief.com](mailto:news@islandchief.com)

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Dear Readers,

As we usher in the month of February, we are delighted to bring you the latest insights and updates from the captivating world of Maldivian travel. The Maldives has started the year on an impressive note, welcoming over 140,000 tourists by Wednesday, marking a notable 10.5 percent increase from the previous year. We also note key statistics shaping the tourism landscape as Russia continues to assert its dominance in the tourist arrival markets, contributing 11 percent of the market share. The daily averages for 2024 indicate a thriving tourism sector, with an average of 6,115 arrivals and an average stay of eight days.

Our cover story features the fascinating interview with Mr. Dusan Runjajic, the International Sales and Marketing Director of MARES. Mr. Runjajic shares his two-decade journey, providing a unique perspective on the evolution of MARES and his personal connection to the brand. Join us as we delve into the challenges of aligning corporate ideals with market demands and explore MARES' commitment to innovation and sustainability.

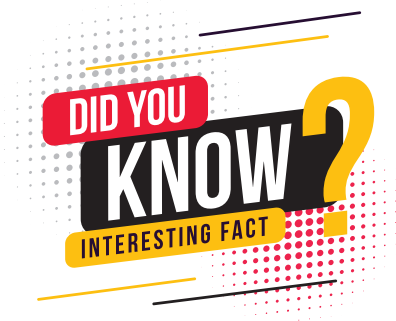
In this month's Bon Appétit section, we have a delightful treat inspired by the vibrant flavors of the Indian subcontinent and the Maldives: the Falooda Mousse Cake. Originating from the rich culinary traditions of India, Pakistan, and the Middle East, Falooda is a beloved ice cream dessert featuring a medley of vermicelli, jelly, rose syrup, sabja seeds, milk, and ice cream. This innovative recipe, crafted by former Pastry Commis Chef Aminath Amaany Hussain from Meeru Island Resort & Spa, pays homage to the cherished Falooda drink, especially popular during the month of Ramazan in Maldivian households (page 22).

In our highly anticipated segment, 'Frankly Speaking' on page 23, industry experts delve into the trend of Russia emerging as the dominant market for tourist arrivals in the Maldives. Industry insiders weigh in on the key factors driving this phenomenon and offer insights into how this trend might evolve in the coming months. Their perspectives shed light on the evolving dynamics of international tourism and the strategic shifts shaping travel preferences and destinations.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the Islandchief Travel Magazine as we bring you closer to the heart of the Maldives' tourism narrative. Here's to another year of discovery, adventure, and the timeless beauty that the Maldives has to offer.

Until next time,

**The Islandchief Team**



## British War Memorial, Addu City

Situated on Gan Island within the Addu Atoll, the British War Memorial commemorates the service of British soldiers stationed at the Royal Air Force base there from 1941 to 1976. Constructed as a rectangular stone pillar, it features marble panels on three sides inscribed with the names of the honored soldiers. The fourth face bears an explanatory inscription in English, Hindi, and Urdu. Gan Island, once a military stronghold, now stands as a site of remembrance and tribute.

PHOTO CREDIT: Ibrahim Firaq

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# Maldivian Announces Increase in Flight Frequency to Hoarafushi Airport Starting April 2024

Maldivian has announced operation of four weekly flights to Hoarafushi Airport starting April 1, 2024. Flights will be carried out on every Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Since the inauguration of Hoarafushi Airport in November 2020, Maldivian has been operating three weekly flights to the island on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The current schedule will be followed till March 31, 2024.

Maldivian flights to Hoarafushi are operated on the carriers; ATR 42/2 series and the De Havilland Dash8s.

The airport development project worth MVR 198 million, consists of a runway measuring 1,200 meters, an apron and taxiway measuring 8,635 square meters, a parking area measuring 9,473 square meters as well as service roads in front of the terminal.



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## ACROSS THE SKIES

# Emirates Readies to Recruit 5,000 Cabin Crew from Six Continents in 2024



Emirates is celebrating the new year and the imminent arrival of its spanking new fleet of Airbus A350s with a global cabin crew recruitment drive with a difference. The 5,000 new joiners will ensure the airline's commitment to offering the world's best inflight experience maintains a steady course.

The recruitment drive is designed primarily for those who will soon or have recently stepped into the world of work. The airline is inviting fresh graduates with internships or part-time jobs on their résumés, those with a year or so of hospitality or customer service experience, and individuals keen to embark on an exciting career traveling the globe. The new recruits will be a part of the world's largest international airline and one of the most iconic brands, plus they will learn hospitality and life skills from the best trainers in the business.

What's more, they will travel the world

across more than 140 cities in 76 countries and enjoy the entire gamut of benefits working as Emirates' cabin crew.

## Recruitment drive

In 2024, Emirates' recruitment team will host open days and assessments in more than 460 cities across six continents, reflecting the span of the airline's network and the diversity of its cabin crew team, while flying the flag for living and working in dynamic Dubai.

In 2023, Emirates hired a staggering 8,000 cabin crew and held recruitment events in 353 cities as the airline ramped up its services post the pandemic. In August 2023, the airline's cabin crew numbers crossed the 20,000 milestone and are now 21,500 strong.

## Fleet and network expansion

The new cabin crew recruitment drive comes as Emirates begins to take delivery of its eagerly anticipated A350s from

mid-year and the Boeing 777-Xs starting in 2025. The airline has 65 A350s and a mix of 205 777-9s and 777-8s in its order book. The new aircraft will expand the airline's reach and provide flexibility to add new routes to its network.

## Training and life skills

All new cabin crew recruits undergo an intense eight weeks of training in delivering the highest standards of hospitality, safety and service that Emirates' customers have come to expect over the years. Trained in Emirates' state-of-the-art facility in Dubai, cabin crew learn invaluable transferable skills that include a knack for communications, initiative and leadership qualities. They develop the ability to work effectively in a multicultural team, the focus to stay mentally strong and calm under pressure, becoming bastions of hospitality and exceptional service, and ambassadors of an iconic brand. Cabin crew also have access to the latest training programmes and LinkedIn courses.

## What new joiners say

Ane Monego Castagna from Italy, who joined May 2023 said: "Sometimes you've got to chase your dreams, other times the dream chases you. In April last year, I received the 'golden call' that changed my life. During training, I was amazed by the knowledge and skills imparted to us and what it took to become an Emirates cabin crew. The opportunity to make friends for life, be super confident and to fly with the airline is priceless. Thanks to Emirates, the life I live today is better than anything I have ever dreamed of!"

Robyn Clark from the UK, who joined in

February 2023 said: "Working for Emirates is a job like no other. From the day I got the call to boarding every flight, I feel so proud of what I've accomplished. Putting on the iconic Emirates uniform every morning is a feeling I can't explain – this really is a dream come true. I will always be grateful to Emirates for the memories I've made, the amazing experiences I've had traveling the world, and being able to come back from my journeys to Dubai – one of the safest and most vibrant cities globally – that I now call home."

## Cabin crew community

Emirates' multicultural cabin crew team hail from more than 140 nationalities and speak a staggering 130 languages – which is why customers can always expect to converse with a warm, friendly voice in their own lingo. Crew form lifelong friendships and close-knit bonds within the community, fostering better teamwork, a common sense of purpose and a shared service philosophy.

Cabin crew experience excellent career progression, including upgrading to higher cabin classes, and becoming a cabin supervisor, purser or trainer. Today, the airline has 1,180 pursers who have climbed the career ladder after successfully completing exacting training and assessments. Crew also have the opportunity to apply for internal vacancies throughout the Emirates Group.

## The cabin crew life

Emirates' cabin crew lead a cosmopolitan lifestyle in vibrant Dubai, living with 200 nationalities in a city renowned for its hotels, restaurants, food scene, leisure activities and for being one of the safest in the world.

# MACL Announces the Inauguration of its Brand-new Cargo Terminal

Maldives Airports Company Pvt Ltd has announced the inauguration of the new Cargo Terminal by the esteemed presence of President Dr. Mohamed Muizz at Velana International Airport on January 15, 2024.

The cargo terminal is a step into the future with state-of-the-art facilities designed to elevate cargo operations to new heights. Starting from January 15, 2024, all imported cargo will be released from the new terminal.

According to the circular released by MACL, the harbor area of the new Cargo Terminal

can hold up to 15 vessels at the same time, vessels will be granted access to the harbor after goods have been cleared and released, vessels awaiting clearance may wait at the old cargo harbor, each vessel will be allocated 45 minutes to load the cargo and MACL foremen and security guards will be on-site to assist in the process.

MACL works to ensure a smooth transition of its import operations and requests support from all in the transitional phase. Export operations are set to continue in the old cargo terminal until further notice from MACL.





IN A NUTSHELL

# Celebrate the 'Year of the Dragon' with Jumeirah Maldives Olhahali Island's Lunar New Year Offering



Welcome the ‘Year of the Dragon’ in style with Jumeirah Maldives Olhahali Island and enjoy a series of exciting events this Lunar New Year. From exceptional culinary experiences to a range of family-friendly activities, there are limited edition events to suit all guests, running exclusively from February 9 to 13, 2024.

For those looking to tantalize their taste buds, the resort’s ‘Flavours of China’ experience will be sure to delight, offering a culinary journey through the best of Chinese cuisine. Three of Jumeirah Guangzhou’s renowned Chinese head chefs have crafted two set menus – a four-course menu and an eight-course menu – featuring authentic dishes bursting with flavor and color. For those looking to further elevate their dining experience, a selection of the finest Chinese wines has been carefully curated to perfectly complement each and every dish.

Families heading to the resort to celebrate the Lunar New Year will find plenty to keep the little ones busy, with an exciting variety of seasonal family-friendly events, in addition to the resort’s existing family offering, with over 50 activities available. Whether it’s dragon mask making at MURACA Art Studio or a Chinese lantern release ceremony at Glow, the whole family will love celebrating at Jumeirah Maldives Olhahali Island, with playful activities designed to create last memories for all. When it comes to downtime, the resort’s spacious one-, two-, and three-bedroom villas offer the perfect space for a family retreat, with separate living spaces and bedrooms providing plenty of space to relax in comfort and style.

For guests looking to unwind in between festivities, they can experience various rejuvenating rituals with the resort’s visiting wellness practitioner Dr. Syed Afzal. Offering personalized guided wellness experiences and holistic therapies, including one-to-one pranic healing and traditional Chinese acupuncture sessions, guests can indulge in the perfect fusion of ancient wisdom and modern wellness to ensure a relaxing start to the ‘Year of the Dragon’. Driven by a deep passion for wellbeing, Dr. Syed assists guests with reaching higher levels of relaxation, rejuvenation, and balance in the midst of paradise within the captivating overwater treatment rooms of the Talise Spa.

Marine life lovers will relish the opportunity to head out on a Dolphin Quest, witnessing the beauty of dolphins in their natural habitat, while those who are looking for a more immersive experience can opt for the Ocean Wonders Snorkelling experience. A Sunset Cruise will also set sail on Monday 12 February, giving guests the chance to experience the beautiful Maldivian sunset while sipping on bubbly to the rhythmic beats of traditional Maldivian BoduBeru drumming.

Surrounded by a breathtaking natural landscape, Jumeirah Maldives Olhahali Island offers a luxurious island escape for travelers looking to get away this Lunar New Year. The resort offers 67 beach and over-water villas, each designed in a contemporary style with their own private rooftop terraces, as well as six restaurants and bars which offer Jumeirah Group’s signature dining experiences and unparalleled views of the Indian Ocean.



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MARINE VIBE  
M. Nimsa View  
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IN A NUTSHELL

# Valentine’s Day Reimagined into Month-long Celebration of Romance at Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives



Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives celebrates Valentine’s Day every day during February with the second annual ‘Month of Love’. Following on the success of the promotion in 2023, a focus on romantic getaways and special activities designed for couples including the popular 100-Light Dinner on the beach and Couples’ Massage Workshops to name just two, are back for 2024.

“Valentine’s Day is celebrated around the world on 14th February, but last year, for the first time, we decided to celebrate all month here at Kandooma Maldives. It was a hit with guests, so we decided to do it again for 2024,” said Mark Eletr, General Manager, Holiday Inn Resort

Kandooma Maldives.

“A tropical island getaway inspires romance like nothing else. This year Valentine’s Day falls on a Wednesday, so by having the entire month of February as a celebration of love and togetherness, we offer flexibility to couples to enjoy our one island, one resort experience,” Kandooma’s February ‘Month of Love’ celebrates romance with a focus on shared experiences, exquisite dining and creating memories.

The resort has just unveiled a new Wedding Brochure packed with ideas for couples who might like to elope or plan a lavish destination wedding.

“Our team enjoys collaborating with guests to pull off special surprises, weddings and even marriage proposals. So if there is an intention, let us know and we’ll help you make it happen.”

Among the favored activities for proposals are trips to a private sandbank for an intimate dinner or picnic, the Champagne catamaran sunset cruise and underwater proposals, explains Mark.

The ultimate in romance is Kandooma’s Private Dining priced at US\$299++ per couple and includes a 4-course set menu served with a bottle of Champagne. Couples have a choice of intimate venues around the island including the tower rooftop, beach, yoga sala, jetty and within the gardens.

Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives is an all-villa resort and private island. Each villa receives complimentary bottled water daily and a selection of tea and freshly ground coffee. Complimentary Wi-Fi access is available in-villa and in public areas.

“Our overwater villas are very popular,” explains Mark. “They often book out well in advance, so I encourage people to book early. We also have some stunning beach villas and two-storey beach houses. There are many options available to suit different guest preferences.”

Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives is home

to Kandooma Spa by COMO Shambhala, which features a purpose built Couples’ Spa villa with its own private pool, oversized tub and treatment zones nestled within the island gardens. The luxuriously indulgent ‘Stay Romantic’ spa experience which includes half an hour pool relaxation time, a 90-minute massage for two and an invigorating bath (20-mins) in the oversized tub is a hit with couples at US\$275++ per couple for 2 hours.

The resort’s Spa also offers a ‘Couples Massage Workshop’ where guests learn massage techniques for both chair- and bed-based massage. The expert therapists explain the anatomy of the back and key areas to target for optimum relaxation as well as the sequence to a massage which couples can master with practice.

During the February ‘Month of Love’ 2024 at Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives experience an Island Romance getaway including:

- Accommodation and return speed boat transfer for 2 adults.
- Daily buffet breakfast and dinner for 2 adults at Kandooma Café.
- In-villa romantic breakfast with a glass of champagne for 2 adults once during the stay.
- Private 4 course Beach Dinner\* with Bottle of Champagne once during the stay.
- Dive Free - up to two Free Scuba Dives per day for two certified divers per villa (T&Cs apply)

# The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands Celebrates 2023 Ocean Conservation Highlights

Forming part of the coveted Fari Islands’ lifestyle concept, The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands has been championing environmental education since its opening in 2021. A destination that’s fast becoming an iconic addition to the Indian Ocean, is also home to a hub of innovation when it comes to environmental conservation. The resort steps lightly into 2024 celebrating its continued dedication to the protection of our natural world.

‘Eye in the Sky’ Drone Technology Spearheaded by resort naturalists and a progressive research community, The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands’ sophisticated ocean plastics’ monitoring program works to conserve one of the world’s most fragile ecosystems with the use of drones. In partnership with British PhD researcher Melissa Schiele, drone technology has been developed and deployed in and around the atoll to better understand the location and movement of ocean plastics, including discarded fishing nets (ghost nets). With immediate impact resort teams are able to locate and remove otherwise hard to find debris identified by drones.

In 2023 the resort’s naturalist team and dive network removed 19 ghost nets with an estimated weight of 1100kg. These ghost nets travel into the east Indian Ocean via strong ocean winds and currents experienced in the region from mid-December. In 2023, the resort successfully rescued five olive ridley sea turtles

found entangled in abandoned nets. Two turtles were released immediately, with three rehabilitated by the Olive Ridley Project’s veterinary team at the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre in Baa Atoll, before a successful reintroduction to the ocean. A rehabilitated turtle named ‘Muraka’, released on August 16, 2023, was fitted with a GPS tracking device to allow guests and followers to trace her journey.

Since opening, the resort has achieved 751 drone flights aiding critical research in to plastic aggregation, location of ghost nets and ongoing monitoring of wildlife. In a first-of-its-kind image collection and data processing project, impressive data from the drone initiative was drawn for collaborative use to inform, educate and drive positive change long-term. Over 21 ocean species were observed in 2023, from the Ornate Eagle Ray, Black Tip Reef Shark to Melon-Headed Whale.

Jean-Michel Cousteau Ambassadors of the Environment program Home to the Maldives’ first Jean-Michel Cousteau Ambassadors of the Environment program, The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands continues to collaborate with the world-renowned oceanographic explorer and environmentalist to provide guest experiences with preservation of the planet at its core. In 2023 the program planted 40 coral frames as part of its coral regeneration initiative, using coral frags from the Pocillapora (Cauliflower corals) and the Acropora (Table coral). 25 of

these abundant nursery frames, and successful new habitats for ocean life, can be seen by guests in the shallow waters of the resort’s welcome jetty on arrival.

The resort will welcome Jean-Michel Cousteau in 2024 from the 8th to 18th April. An inspired educational residency will include exclusive guest experiences and Q&As with the legendary explorer.

Community Footprints As part of its Community Footprints’ programming, and with focus on environmental awareness for the planet’s future generations, the resort’s relationships with local schools enable visits with its naturalist teams to share research and educate. In 2023 five educational excursions to local islands took place including schools in Dhiffushi and Gaafaru. The visits took a deep dive in to ocean conservation, from the environmental impact of ocean plastics, insights from the resort community’s drone research and shared observations of wildlife in the surrounding atoll. Presentations of ground-breaking research from the resort’s ‘Visiting Heroes’ programme included the work of renowned shark scientist Gibbs Kuguru and his conservation work tagging Blacktip Reef Sharks.

Closer to home, the resort was proud to engage in ten global environmental dates. Educational and inspired activities worked to raise awareness surrounding key calendar dates including; World Shark Day, World Dolphin Day,



Ocean Clean Up Day, and Earth Day. A continuation of its Community Footprints programming, 11 beach clean-ups invited guests to support ocean debris collection on resort shores and the local islands of Dhiffushi and Gaafaru.

Creating a Sustainable Environment for the Future The resort continues to grow its commitment to sustainable practices in its day-to-day operations, from increasing its production of renewable energy via its solar power infrastructure, purification of still and sparkling drinking water at its dedicated plant, treating greywater for landscaping, and a robust composting programme for daily food waste.

With a considered approach to luxury living, guests can expect to use reusable glass water bottles, bamboo-based personal consumables, refillable jars of amenities, and bamboo and stainless-steel straws. Organic Bamford amenities, with shared sensibilities of living consciously and in harmony with nature, are replenished on-site, while the resort’s desalination plant reduces the amount of plastic imported into the country.



# Sun Siyam Vilu Reef Hosts Educational Program on Sustainable Tourism for Milan-Bicocca and IULM University Students and Lecturers



Sun Siyam Vilu Reef, the ultimate tropical boutique hideaway, was honored to welcome students and lecturers from Milan-Bicocca and IULM University, Italy, in a special educational initiative organized by MaRHE Center of the University of Milano-Bicocca, under the coordination of Elena dell'Agnese and Claudio Melli. This collaboration aimed to enhance awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism practices in the pristine environment of the Maldives.

The visit, which took place on January 15, 2024, saw eager students and experienced lecturers from Milan-Bicocca and IULM University exploring the sustainability initiatives implemented by Sun Siyam Vilu Reef. The resort's dedicated sustainability team guided the visitors through various aspects of their eco-friendly practices, showcasing the commitment to responsible tourism.

During the tour of the charming island,

participants gained insights into the resort's conservation efforts. Sun Siyam Vilu Reef sustainability team emphasized the importance of minimizing the environmental footprint in the Maldives, a region known for its exquisite natural beauty.

Highlighting the success of the collaboration, Printey, representative of the Sustainability team at Sun Siyam Vilu Reef, expressed, "We are delighted to have hosted the students and lecturers from Milan-Bicocca and IULM University in partnership with the MaRHE Centre. This collaboration aligns with our commitment to promoting sustainable tourism and fostering environmental awareness. We believe that such initiatives contribute significantly to creating a positive impact on the global tourism landscape."

As a hands-on element of the educational program, the visitors actively

participated in a tree planting session organized by Sun Siyam Vilu Reef. This engaging activity not only provided practical knowledge about afforestation but also symbolized a shared commitment to environmental preservation.

Claudio Melli, representing the MaRHE Centre, commended the collaboration, stating, "This program exemplifies the power of partnerships in advancing sustainable tourism education. The immersive experience at Sun Siyam Vilu Reef has undoubtedly enriched the understanding of our students and lecturers, fostering a sense of responsibility towards our planet."

The visit concluded on a positive note, with both parties expressing their enthusiasm for future collaborations. Sun Siyam Vilu Reef looks forward to continuing its commitment to sustainable tourism and fostering educational initiatives that promote environmental stewardship.



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## MOVERS &amp; SHAKERS

## Conrad Maldives Rangali Island Appoints Thomas Hoeborn as General Manager

Conrad Maldives Rangali Island announces the appointment of Thomas Hoeborn as General Manager. A hospitality veteran with close to 40 years in the industry, Hoeborn's new role will see him further drive Conrad Maldives Rangali Island's ongoing commitment to luxury and innovative guest experiences.

Jamie Mead, senior director, operations, South East Asia, said, "Thomas' seasoned leadership acumen and track record in luxury hospitality will go a long way in further cementing Conrad Maldives Rangali Island's leadership position in Maldives' competitive luxury market. Through his deep-rooted understanding of the Conrad brand ethos, we are confident that Conrad Maldives Rangali Island will continue to elevate excellence and be the luxury hotel of choice for thoughtful, purposeful and conscientious travelers to this inspiring destination."

Hoeborn most recently served as Area General Manager in Central China, where he oversaw the operations and performance of eight Hilton and

Conrad hotels, including the 728-room Conrad Shanghai. Prior to his stint in Central China, Hoeborn was Area General Manager of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan for Hilton's multi-branded hotels in the region, and General Manager of the internationally-acclaimed Conrad Hong Kong. Through his career, he had also helmed various leadership roles across Hilton properties in Hong Kong, Japan and Thailand.

"I am thrilled to embark on this next chapter of my career, this time taking the helm of the esteemed Conrad Maldives Rangali Island. The resort is known for its exceptional service and innovation, thanks to the unwavering dedication of the team. I look forward to contributing to the resort's legacy and ensuring that our guests continue to enjoy the exceptional experiences that we are known for," says Hoeborn.

Conrad Maldives Rangali Island is part of Hilton Honors®, the award-winning guest loyalty program for Hilton's 22 world-class brands. Hilton Honors members who book directly through preferred



Hilton channels have access to instant benefits, including a flexible payment slider that allows members to choose nearly any combination of Points and money to book a stay, an exclusive member discount that can't be found anywhere else and free standard WiFi. Members also have access to contactless technology exclusively through the industry-leading Hilton Honors mobile app, where Hilton Honors members can check-in, choose their room and access their room using Digital Key.

## Sun Siyam Iru Veli Maldives Welcomes Accomplished Hospitality Leader, Masdhooq Saeed as New General Manager



Sun Siyam Iru Veli, Maldives is delighted to announce the appointment of Masdhooq Saeed as General Manager, signifying a pivotal moment in the resort's quest for the ultimate tropical island getaway while crafting enchanting, but authentic experiences for its guests.

With an impressive track record spanning over 22 years in the hospitality industry, Masdhooq brings a wealth of experience from renowned brands such as One&Only Resorts, Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts, and Six Senses Hotels, Resorts and Spas. His extensive expertise encompasses overseeing all facets of the Rooms Division, leading pre-opening projects in the Maldives and China, and playing a crucial role in the successful rebranding of Diva Maldives into LUX\* South Ari Atoll in 2011.

In Masdhooq's own words, "Luxury is a feeling, not a product. It is an emotional connection that we create with our guests and the myriad experiences we offer. Our guests seek personalized, unique experiences that align with their ethical values over monetary value. This is what makes our guests tick. And when you get that right, when you are able to make that connection, you win—hearts, minds, and so much more."

Masdhooq consistently stands out as a transformative figure, actively developing others and providing opportunities that one may need. Under his unwavering command and clarion call that "Anything Is Possible," he has not only built

teams but also guided careers and introduced new services, setting the benchmark year after year. He has a style that exudes both humility and supreme confidence, with unwavering devotion to his guests, team, company, and industry.

His exceptional leadership and strategic vision were clearly demonstrated by achieving the number one spot on TripAdvisor for LUX\* North Male' Atoll within just five months of opening in 2019. Masdhooq's commitment to forging emotional connections with guests, providing personalized and unique experiences aligned with ethical values, underscores his belief that luxury is a feeling.

"With Masdhooq at the helm, we are confident in delivering unparalleled enchanting but truly authentic guests experiences while fostering lasting connections with our valued guests at Sun Siyam Iru Veli. His dedication to identifying talent, building teams, and guiding careers, coupled with a passion for surpassing guest expectations, undoubtedly positions Masdhooq to elevate Sun Siyam Iru Veli to new heights. "We eagerly anticipate the continued success and excellence that Masdhooq will bring to our resort", said Deepak Booneady, CEO at Sun Siyam Resorts.



## MOVERS &amp; SHAKERS

# Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi Appoints New General Manager, TJ Joulak



Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi, the epitome of luxury in the Maldives and leader of unparalleled bespoke service, is delighted to announce the

appointment of TJ Joulak as General Manager. A veteran in luxury hospitality, Joulak has over 25 years of experience in the industry and worked across markets in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Previously having helmed various luxury portfolios in the Shangri-La Group, Joulak for providing memorable experiences for guests. Fluent in English, Arabic, French, Italian and Spanish, his multilingual abilities set him apart and will enable him to establish meaningful relationships with guests to provide a highly personal approach to service that encompasses all nationalities and backgrounds.

As a hands-on and energetic leader, Joulak is perfectly placed to take the helm at the property and lead it into the future, thanks to his unique ability to translate the brand's strategy into service elements. This coupled with his impressive record of excellence, demonstrated by the accolades he has received in recent years, including Best General Manager Europe 2022 and the Luxury Lifestyle Top

100 Hotel General Managers 2023, will lead Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi to new heights of personalized customer satisfaction.

Joulak received the Lifetime Julian Star Award in 2022 and was named among the 100 Most Inspirational People in Global Hospitality & Travel 2023 by the International Hospitality Institute, exemplifying his commitment to operational excellence which will be integral to his new role at Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi.

Commenting on his appointment, TJ Joulak says: "I am thrilled and honored to join the exceptional team at the Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi. The Maldives has long captivated visitors with its enchanting natural setting, and the Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi complements this with its commitment to deliver unparalleled personalized experience for every guest. I am excited to continue building upon this legacy, and together with the talented staff, elevate the property to new heights and set new standards in the world of luxury hospitality."



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MOVERS & SHAKERS

# UNWTO Appoints Mohamed Ali Janah as UN Tourism Special Advisor



The Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) designated Esteemed Maldivian entrepreneur Mr.Mohamed Ali Janah as the UN Tourism Special Advisor.

This appointment was made by His Excellency Mr Zurab Pololikashvili, secretary general of UNWTO in a ceremony hosted in Madrid, Spain on January 23, 2024.

Mr. Janah thanked HE Zurab and the UNWTO for the trust placed in him and assured that he will do his best for the organization and its important work globally, as well as for his beautiful country the Maldives!

Mr. Mohamed Ali Janah is the principal advisor on trade and investment for the President of Maldives, Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, and the President for Maldives National Association for Construction Industry (MNACI) and National Federation of Maldivian Employers (NFME). Mr. Janah has also been honored with the title of Faces of South Asian Tourism in 2023 by South Asian Travel Awards.

Janah and his company, HARIM, have played a pivotal role in attracting substantial investments and investors to the Maldives. Their commitment to the country's development is reflected in their involvement in various

investment projects with a total value exceeding USD 700 million.

Some of the notable resorts in the hospitality industry that Janah and his team have completed include Soneva Fushi, Soneva Gili, Four Seasons Kuda Huraa, and Shangrila's Villingili Resort. Additionally, Janah serves as the Honorary Advisor to Pristine Maldives, which is involved in significant projects such as GA. Maamutaa development and the GA. Kooddoo airport expansion project, GA. Kooddoo Airport Hotel project, and the management of the domestic GA. Kooddoo airport.

Furthermore, he has been involved at the international level, having served on the Executive Board of the International Federation of Asian and Western Pacific Contractors' Associations (IFAWPCA) and currently holding the position of President at IFAWPCA.

# The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort Appoints Fahdrul Abd Malek as Executive Chef

The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort is delighted to announce the appointment of Fahdrul Abd Malek as Executive Chef.

A seasoned culinary professional with a rich background in fine dining, Chef Fahdrul brings a wealth of experience and a passion for creating exceptional gastronomic experiences. A native Malaysian hailing from a family of various culinary artists, Chef Fahdrul developed his love for food and cooking at an early age drawing inspiration from his brothers. His culinary journey in the hospitality industry began in 1997 at the New World Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, and over the past two decades, he has become a distinguished Malaysian culinary expert.

Chef Fahdrul's extensive hospitality career as a chef has allowed him to work, travel and gain experience in countries such as Vietnam and Australia. He has had the privilege of working with renowned luxury hotel groups such as Hilton, Starwood, Mandarin Oriental, and more. His commitment to excellence and innovative culinary skills has earned him recognition in the industry.

Before joining The Westin Maldives, Chef Fahdrul held the prestigious position of Executive Chef at Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas, where he showcased his culinary prowess and contributed to the resort's culinary success.

"We are thrilled to welcome Chef Fahdrul Abd Malek to The Westin Maldives as our Executive Chef," said Vijay Kumar, General Manager of The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort. "Chef Fahdrul's extensive experience and dedication to culinary excellence align perfectly with The Westin brand's commitment to providing guests with unforgettable dining experiences including the Eat Well concept. We look forward to elevating our culinary offerings under his leadership."

The Westin's Eat Well concept is a culinary philosophy designed to prioritize well-being without compromising on taste. Emphasizing nutritious, balanced, and flavorful options. Eat Well menus cater to diverse preferences while promoting a holistic approach to dining. From fresh, locally sourced ingredients to thoughtfully crafted dishes, Eat Well reflects Westin's



commitment to nourishing both body and soul during travelers' stay at Westin hotels.

Chef Fahdrul expressed his enthusiasm for his new role, stating, "I am honored to join The Westin Maldives and be a part of a team that is dedicated to delivering exceptional hospitality. I look forward to bringing my passion for fine dining to the beautiful Maldives, creating memorable culinary experiences for our guests."

When Fahdrul is not occupied crafting

delectable dishes, you will likely find him cherishing precious moments with his wife and three children. Unlike many chefs who prefer to stay away from their own kitchens after a day's work, Chef Fahdrul takes genuine pleasure in preparing meals for his family at home.

The Westin Maldives is confident that Chef Fahdrul's appointment will enhance the resort's culinary offerings and further solidify its reputation as a premier destination for unique dining experiences in the Maldives.



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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

with

DUSAN RUNJAJIC

International Sales & Marketing Director  
Mares

“Embarking on this journey as a diving instructor, I never foresaw it becoming a lifelong vocation; it unfolded as a twist of fate rather than a deliberate plan, shaping my perspective on the dive industry over the years.”

*In this issue of the Islandchief, we have Mr. Dusan Runjajic, the International Sales and Marketing Director of MARES. The discussion delves into his career spanning over two-decades and the evolution of Mares. From his unexpected entry into diving as a student instructor to navigating Mares through industry changes, the interview explores his personal connection with the brand and pivotal moments shaping both his career and diving technology. We also the brand's commitment to innovation and sustainability, unveiling the challenges in aligning corporate ideals with market demands.*

**Your journey into the diving industry began in 1988, so the question is; how did your role as an instructor, while still a student, shape your perspective on diving and influence your later career choices?**

To be honest, when I stepped into the realm of diving as an instructor, I never anticipated it would become a lifelong vocation. It started as a means to support my studies, and the idea of a lasting career in the dive industry wasn't on my radar. It unfolded more as a twist of fate than a deliberate plan, a few years down the road.

**Apart from your own history, Mares has a longstanding history as well – dating back to 1949. In your view, how has the brand's commitment to innovation evolved over the years, particularly in the context of environmental responsibility?**

Beyond my personal journey, Mares, with its roots tracing back to 1949, has a rich history. In the context of today's heightened focus on environmental subjects and sustainability, the brand's commitment to innovation is paramount. The world is increasingly aware of these issues, thanks to the efforts of numerous companies. As part of a corporate group alongside tennis and ski sports, Mares developed a sustainability mindset long before it became a mainstream topic.

Preceding widespread discussions on sustainability, Mares was already exploring the use of reusable and recycled materials, optimizing production processes to minimize waste. The company proactively aligned with

evolving global regulations, aiming for continuous improvement. Despite persistent efforts, reaching a perfect sustainability level remains elusive due to the necessity of new raw materials in certain product groups, such as Neoprene and fins.

Packaging, a crucial aspect, involves using recycled materials for carton boxes. However, the challenge arises in plastic packaging, even if made from recycled materials. An illustrative example is a biodegradable box designed to house masks. While environmentally friendly and capable of dissolving in water within days, market preferences for transparent packaging hinder its acceptance.

Despite a sincere commitment to sustainable practices, the company faces the reality that the world has not fully embraced these efforts. This underscores the ongoing struggle between companies striving for sustainability and market demands. The tale of the biodegradable mask box serves as a poignant example of the complexities involved, revealing that even with proactive measures, not every initiative aligns with market expectations.

**Your first contact with Mares was in 1991, a pivotal time in the diving industry. What factors attracted you to Mares, and how did the industry landscape influence your decision to join the brand?**

In the early '80s, when I started diving in '82, I used various brands, but Mares stood out for me. Hailing from

Croatia, a small country near Italy, Mares had a significant influence in that region due to its founder, Ludovico Mares, being born there. Although he established Mares in Italy in '49, his Croatian roots fostered a strong connection between the brand and the region. Growing up using Mares' products like fins and masks, I developed a sentimental attachment to the brand, especially since I come from a small island and spent my early years by the sea. This connection resonates with the sea-centric lifestyle here in the Maldives.

Mares played a pivotal role in the diving industry by introducing groundbreaking products in the late '70s and early '80s. Notably, they pioneered the use of different materials in swimming fins, combining synthetic Kauchuk with Polymere fin blades, setting a benchmark in the industry. Similarly, Mares was the first to introduce silicon in masks, a technological leap from the traditional use of natural Kauchuk. As a young person witnessing these innovations, I was impressed, and it was an easy decision for me to align with Mares.

**As the International Sales and Marketing Director, you play a crucial role in Mares' global strategy. How do you balance the diverse needs of scuba divers, snorkelers and free divers in the development and marketing of Mares products?**

My role is certainly driven by personal interest in these categories, but it's essential to emphasize that I'm just one part of a dynamic team. While I hold a title, the



strength of our work lies in the collective efforts of talented colleagues. In any endeavor, you're only as good as your team, and I acknowledge the significant contributions of others in various roles.

Our decision-making process is collaborative and involves product line managers who specialize in dedicated product categories. Working closely with R&D and sales teams, decisions are never dictated by a single person; rather, they evolve through extensive brainstorming sessions aimed at understanding and optimizing our products. Fortunately, the wealth of experience within the team makes my role relatively straightforward.

Every decision is a collective effort, and we strive to optimize our knowledge until we reach the final, correct result. This meticulous approach is evident in our product development journey, such as the four-year endeavor to perfect the foot pocket for the freediving fin named "X-Wing." Unlike conventional foot pockets that may cause discomfort, we aimed to create an orthopedically shaped foot pocket, ensuring comfort from small sizes (like 36) upwards, even for barefoot users.

While numerous fins flood the market, the distinction lies in the level of force exerted on the foot during freediving. Creating a comfortable foot pocket that eliminates pressure points became a paramount challenge for us. Such endeavors require time, and it's the collaborative effort of the team that ensures we progress step by step until we achieve a product that satisfies our standards.

**In 1996, you started your employment with Mares. Can you share the dynamics of the diving industry during that period and how Mares positioned itself in the market?**  
I joined Mares in 1996, a period when the diving industry, particularly in the 80s and 90s, was marked by the dominance of a handful of established companies, Mares being one of them. While our roots were firmly in Europe, we expanded our presence to the Americas and later into Asia.

The 90s were relatively smooth for the industry as diving gained popularity and became a trendy pursuit. However, the challenge lay in grappling with the rapid growth of the industry. The demand for diving equipment, exemplified by fins, escalated exponentially year after year.

The turn of the millennium brought a significant shift, not just in terms of industry growth but also in cultural dynamics. In the 20th century, people tended to commit to a single activity for a significant portion of their lives. However, with the emergence of new generations, characterized by diverse interests and activities, the challenge for the diving industry was evident. The culture shifted, and younger individuals, exposed to numerous options, no longer considered diving as essential.

To navigate this shift, the industry, including Mares, focused on creating visually appealing and attractive products. The goal was to design items that captured the interest of the younger generation and countered the changing cultural landscape. This proactive approach aimed to not only adapt to the evolving preferences but also to continue attracting and retaining enthusiasts in the industry.

**With 27 years at Mares, you've witnessed substantial changes in diving technology. What pivotal moments or advancements stand out to you during your tenure with the company?**  
Over my 27 years at Mares, I've witnessed transformative shifts in diving technology. The process of birthing a new product is akin to waiting for a baby to arrive; it involves nurturing an idea, optimizing it, and finally witnessing its birth. Every product launch is met with excitement, fueled

by curiosity about its potential success.

Notable moments include our foray into computer production around 2000-2001, where within just 5 to 6 years, Mares became the first company to introduce a color computer to the market. While colored screens are now commonplace, it was a groundbreaking innovation at the time, challenging industry norms dominated by pixelated displays. This move spurred other well-established companies in the computer business to follow suit.

Another significant advancement was the introduction of liquid skin technology in masks. Traditional silicon masks posed comfort challenges due to stiffness. Mares revolutionized this by combining softer and harder silicon in what we call liquid skin technology. This innovative approach enhanced mask comfort by accommodating variations in individual facial shapes, similar to the diversity found in shoe sizes. The subjective nature of mask fittings mirrors the uniqueness of each person's preferences and facial features.

**The Mares dive computer is a vital tool for divers. Could you delve into the intricacies of designing a user-friendly yet technologically advanced device that provides real-time data for a safer dive?**  
The Mares dive computer is an indispensable tool for divers, combining user-friendly design with cutting-edge technology for a safer dive experience. Ensuring safety is paramount in our approach, positioning us as leaders in the dive computer industry. Our focus lies in providing divers with quick access to vital information through a simple and intuitive interface, making us among the best in the market.

While we excel in pure dive computers, it's worth noting that in the realm of multi-sports computers, there are devices with more extensive functions applicable to various sports. Although we currently don't compete in the multi-sports computer market, our commitment to safety, functionality, and simplicity makes our dive computers among the top-tier choices available.

**Dive watches are both functional and stylish. How does Mares strike the right balance between durability for underwater exploration and aesthetics for everyday wear in its dive watch designs?**  
Dive watches from Mares embody both functionality and style. Striking the perfect equilibrium between durability for underwater adventures and aesthetics for everyday wear is a meticulous process. An essential aspect is our focus on a rechargeable battery design, ensuring longevity that spans many years—typically around 6 to 8 years for the watch I have here. This approach aligns with our commitment to environmental concerns, as we aim to create not just a timepiece but a lifestyle product that offers both satisfaction and sustainability.

**As someone deeply involved in sales and marketing, how do you foresee the future of the diving market, and how is Mares positioning itself to adapt to emerging trends?**  
Being deeply immersed in sales and marketing, I envision an increasing array of challenges for the diving market due to ongoing cultural shifts driven by new generations. As we compete with various outdoor sports, our industry faces the need to adapt continuously. Unlike exceptional cases like the Maldives, where diving holds a prominent status, we must acknowledge the global reality where diving competes with numerous other activities.

In destinations like the Maldives, diving stands out as a top-tier activity, capturing the essence of the region. However, this exceptional status is not universal worldwide. To navigate this challenge, the industry must stay attuned to emerging trends, crafting new products and courses that align with the preferences of younger

generations. Creating a trend that blends beauty and fashion into the diving experience can be a key strategy to engage and attract enthusiasts.

Remaining vigilant and receptive to change is crucial. Unlike a crocodile with small ears and a big mouth, we must actively listen, observe, and comprehend the evolving landscape to take proactive initiatives. Mares, with its commitment to staying alert, is poised to navigate these shifts and seize opportunities in an ever-evolving market.

**Your career has spanned over two decades at Mares. What personal values or principles have guided your decision-making and contributed to your long-term commitment to the brand?**  
With a career spanning over two decades at Mares, my enduring commitment to the brand is rooted in my personal values and the working environment. I am deeply passionate about the sea and the ocean, making it more than just a job for me. Even after more than 40 years of diving, the excitement remains, whether it's encountering a tiny nudibranch or observing intricate details in coral and fish. The sheer beauty of the underwater world fascinates me, and this love for the sea has been a constant in my life.

Beyond my passion for diving, Mares has become more than a workplace; it's my family. Every day at the company has been positive, and I feel blessed to have found an environment where the people and camaraderie are exceptional. This positive atmosphere has made my journey at Mares enjoyable and fulfilling. It's not just about going to work and returning home; it's about loving what you do and having passion for it.

Luck has played a role in my journey, being in the right place at the right time. However, focus and dedication are also crucial. If I weren't part of Mares, I couldn't see myself working for another company because of the strong bond and positive environment that has been integral to my professional life.

**Looking ahead, what excites you most about the future of diving technology, and how does Mares plan to stay at the forefront of these advancements?**  
Gazing into the future, what sparks my enthusiasm is the continuous evolution of diving technology. At Mares, we are in a perpetual state of innovation, with our 75th anniversary on the horizon. As part of our commitment to staying at the forefront of advancements, we've discreetly included four upcoming products in our catalogues sent to dealers. These undisclosed surprises are set to make waves in the market next year.

Our strategy involves meticulous planning, ensuring we have a well-thought-out roadmap for the next 2 to 3 years. Product development is a journey that spans several years, from conceptualization and planning to execution and market availability. While it presents challenges, it's a positive and exhilarating endeavor. Imagine being akin to an artist, envisioning improvements and cultivating ideas that lead to the creation of something extraordinary—a challenge that remains perpetual and, most importantly, enjoyable.





## NEW OPENINGS

# Stone Hotels Dhiffushi Officially Opens its Doors



In a breathtaking inauguration ceremony held this Saturday evening, Stone Hotels, the premier hotel group in Dhiffushi, proudly unveiled its latest masterpiece. The newly launched Stone Hotels promises an unparalleled blend of luxury, serenity, and the captivating charm of the island. The event was graced by Chief Guest Mr. Ahmed Nazim Mohamed, Minister of State for Tourism, along with distinguished guests; Mr. Ahmed Haroon, Member of Parliament for Manadhoo constituency, Ms. Shiuna Khalid, Managing Director of Maldives Integrated Tourism Development Corporation (MITDC), and esteemed members of the island council.

Boasting 50 meticulously designed rooms, each reflecting the vibrant hues of the island, the hotel stands as a sanctuary of refined hospitality along the pristine beachfront. Dhiffushi's intimate size encourages leisurely strolls along its

unspoiled white-sand shores, unveiling a dynamic marine paradise stretching across a 10km house reef.

From the sumptuous Grand Infinity Seaview to the family-friendly Deluxe Family Room, the accommodations boast contemporary amenities and private balconies with awe-inspiring vistas, offering an escape into pure tranquility. Guests can engage in exhilarating activities mere steps from their doorstep, including scuba diving, beach sports, and water adventures. Post-adventures, they can unwind at the lively, "Tuna" café before embarking on the next thrilling chapter at the hotel's distinctive beach club.

Beyond providing lavish lodgings, Stone Hotels invites guests to savor the flavors of Maldivian and international cuisine across its plethora of seven F&B outlets,

offering rooftop sunsets at the Aanu Restaurant & Bar and gastronomic delights at Picanha Steakhouse. Elevating the experience, Stone Hotels transcends conventional accommodations by delivering an all-inclusive Maldivian island immersion, complete with amenities such as an infinity swimming pool, a 24/7 front desk, a private beach, and captivating excursions.

Half a decade ago, we embarked on a transformative journey into community-based tourism, immersing ourselves in authentic Maldivian hospitality," said Abbas Mohamed, Director of Stone Hotels. "This establishment stands as a testament to our commitment to encapsulate Maldivian life, offering five-star accommodations, top-notch services, and amenities tailored for our cherished

tourists. Our brand thrives on the belief that success is intricately tied to the destination and the vibrant island life it represents. Shaping this vision involves a collaborative effort within the community, working tirelessly to ascend to global brand status. Numerous individuals contribute to turning this dream into reality. We also have exciting projects in the pipeline, including a 100-room city hotel spanning 132,000 sqft on Manadhoo island in Noonu Atoll."

"This is more than just a structure; it's a testament to the brilliant minds of designers and architects. I acknowledge President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's unwavering commitment to champion local and community-based tourism—it's at the core of the administration's values and his vision," said Chief Guest Mr. Ahmed Nazim Mohamed, Minister of State for Tourism.

# Island Couture Lands in South Asia with the Opening of SO/ Maldives



Reinventing the luxury island getaway, SO/, the coveted collection of fashion-forward hotels from Ennismore, unveils trend-setting and avant-garde living in the Maldives with the opening of its latest address, SO/ Maldives – a vibrant private-island destination rooted in fashion, art and design.

SO/ Maldives has curated a stylish collection of 80 beachfront and

overwater villas that epitomize modern luxury and command attention with their avant-garde design. Spanning one to three bedrooms and eight categories, the villas are designed for open plan living, each with a private pool and deck from which guests can enjoy ocean views. From the 120 sqm. Lagoon Water Pool Villa Collection and the 410sqm. Three-Bedroom Ocean Water Pool Atelier, to the 238 sqm Family Beach Pool Villa

with Capsule, which features adjoining "sleep pods" for younger travelers and multi-generational groups, each villa is a cocoon of sartorial luxury that comes with Maison CODAGE toiletries, which employ sustainably-sourced vegan ingredients; plush robes and slippers; and individualized concierge service.

SO/ Maldives delivers innovative and diverse restaurant and bar experiences. The Citronelle Club is an all-day dining destination where flavors are woven into a menu of Pan-Asian cuisine while the French, Riviera-inspired Lazuli Beach Club is a sophisticated day-to-night beach bar where guests can enjoy sunbathing around the multicolored mosaic pool. The menu features creative and healthy Mediterranean fare, including a Prosciutto di Parm pizza with olives, wild arugula, parmigiano Reggiano and stracciatella, while vibrant cocktails are waiting to be sipped alongside tunes by visiting DJs in the evenings. Located in the hotel's stunning Arrival Pavilion, Hadaba celebrates the atmosphere and flavors of Arabian nights with Levantine slow-cooked dishes and smoked

delicacies, such as Saltbush Lamb Cutlets with glazed eggplant, za'atar and toum and Maldivian Lobster with Aleppo pepper, garlic butter and finger lime. Guests can also enjoy private in-villa dining or head outside of the resort to sample an assortment of destination food and beverage options.

The property's Wellness Camp is an East-meets-West concept that offers unlimited access to fitness and relaxation in an unparalleled setting. A restorative spa menu curated alongside Salon C. Stellar, featuring Maison CODAGE, Comfort Zone and Odacité products to name a few, offers a nutritive approach to wellness with tailor-made care no matter the treatment. This includes LED and quartz beds for cutting-edge relaxation, ancient wisdom, and maximum personalization to meet guests' every need. From "The Best Facial" whose fans already include Lily Allen and White Lotus star Will Sharpe, to the 75-minute "Astro Facial" which is tailored to an individual's moon sign, each treatment employs carefully selected ingredients, advanced technology and is exquisitely crafted to meet the guests' desired result.

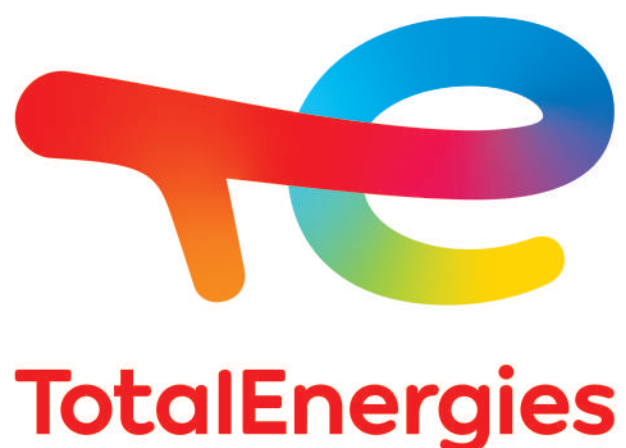


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EVENTS & AWARDS

Build Expo 2024 Concludes Successfully

emphasizing the importance of advancing the products and services of the Maldivian construction industry.

The expo serves as a central hub for construction companies, offering them a platform to showcase raw materials, heavy machinery, and other products associated with construction. This gathering facilitates networking, fosters business alliances, and encourages the exchange of knowledge among key stakeholders in the industry through event segments such as product launches, product highlights, and presentations.

The main sponsor for this edition was Hotels and Resorts Investments Maldives (HARIM), with co-sponsor Renaatus Projects, and a lineup of esteemed partners including Cristallo, Toyo Pumps, Jaguar Maldives, Kin Long, Rainbow Group, STO Construction, Dhivehi Insurance, Ostrava, Seven Oceans, Compass Global, Dhiraagu, and Graphite.

With over 70 exhibitors showcasing innovative products and services, the expo has become a melting pot of ideas, innovations, and collaborations.

The 3rd edition of the National Build Expo successfully concluded, having kicked off on January 11, 2024, at Hulhumale' Central Park. This event for the construction industry professionals, endorsed by SEFM and hosted by Urbanco, is an exceptional platform for showcasing the latest in construction, building, and infrastructure development.

Minister of Climate Change, Environment and Energy, Mr. Thoriq Ibrahim inaugurated the event along with members of Maldives National Association of Construction Industry at 1600hrs on January 11, 2024. Speaking at the ceremony, Minister Thoriq said that construction isn't just an industry, it's our third most beneficial sector, "we are committed to work with the industry to enhance capacity of related exhibitions and improve the existing regulations to better cater for the needs of the industry." He concluded the speech by thanking MNACI and event organizer Medium for their efforts to further promote the industry through Build Expo.

As we gather at the National Build Expo, we are not just witnessing an event; we are witnessing the transformation of our nation's future. The construction industry plays a pivotal role in shaping our infrastructure, and this expo stands as a testament to our commitment to

progress. Together, we build the foundations of a stronger, more resilient tomorrow. Let this expo be a beacon of innovation, collaboration, and growth for the advancement of our great nation."

With two successful events in the past, the National Build Expo 2024 drew an estimated 8 to 10,000 visitors, providing a prime opportunity for professionals to exhibit their products, services, and achievements while



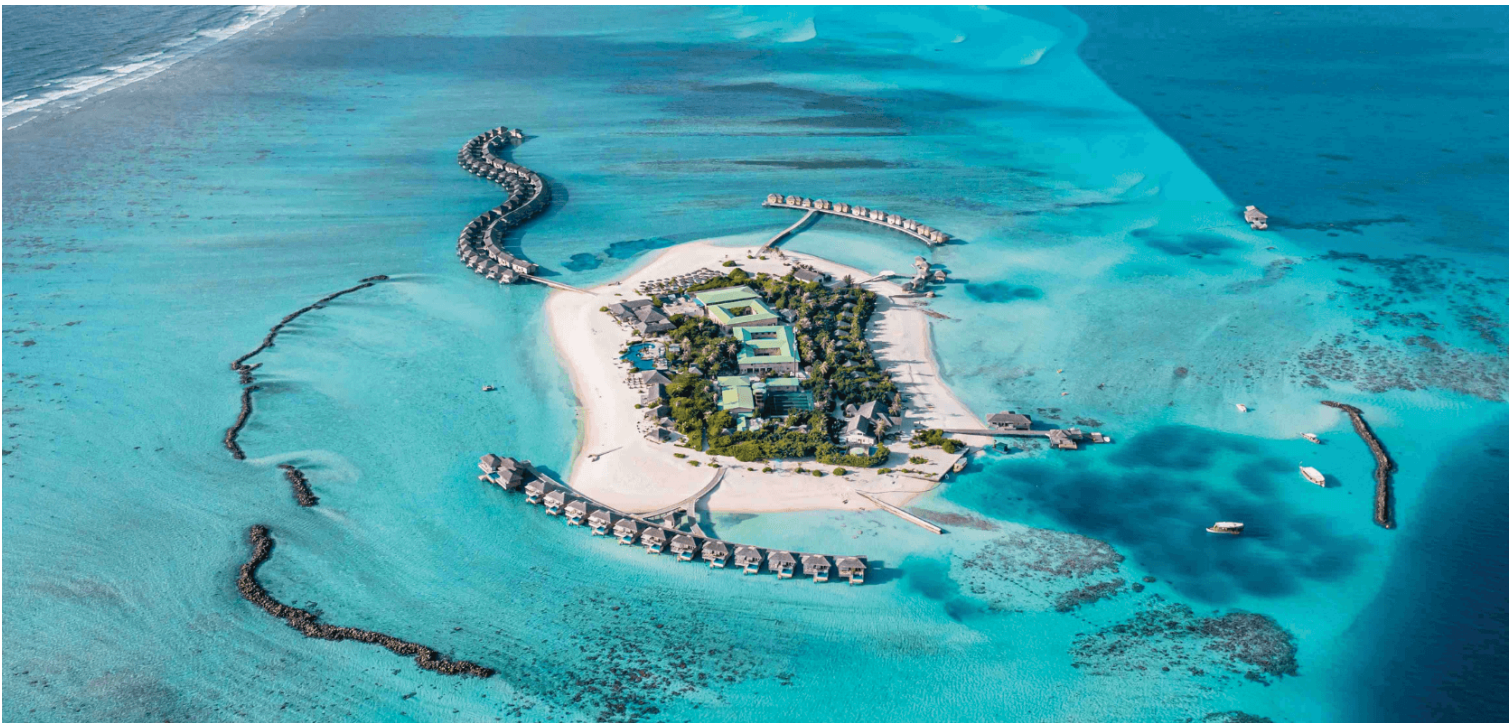


# You & Me Maldives Wins Agoda Circle Choice Awards

You & Me Maldives under the Cocoon Collection has been honored with the prestigious Gold Circle Award 2023 by Agoda.

The Gold Circle Awards, now in its 10th year, commend properties for their exceptional hotel performance. This recognition is based on outstanding customer reviews, elite service, excellence in pricing and availability, and marks a decade of celebrating excellence in the hospitality industry. Nestled in a tranquil and unspoiled corner of the Maldives, You & Me is a secluded and rustic island reachable by a 45-minute seaplane ride from the airport. As one of the rare adults-only resorts in the Maldives, its commitment is to preserve intimacy and a romantic atmosphere, earning us the prestigious "Most Romantic Resort" title at the South Asian Travel Awards this year.

Featuring a total of 109 rooms, including 99 distinctive overwater bungalows, You & Me showcases a unique rustic style with handmade furnishings crafted from natural wood,



inspired by African traditions. Choose from accommodations like Manta Villa offering direct lagoon access on the sunrise side, the Beach Suite with Pool for beach lovers, the Aqua Suite with a pool facing the ocean, or the Aqua Suite with Slide for the ultimate ocean waterpark experience.

With treatment rooms located over the water, You & Me Spa is an amazing sanctuary for a luxurious and

rejuvenating experience with top-quality products from Elizabeth Arden PRO and HESITO®.

Following a pampering spa day, consider booking a tour at our watersports or diving center. You & Me stands as an ideal location to encounter some of the Maldives' most enchanting marine life, including manta rays, turtles, Napoleon fish, and gray reef sharks. Whether it's snorkeling, jet

skis, sailing to nearby uninhabited islands, diving or other activities, we offer a comprehensive range to satisfy even the most adventurous souls.

A highlight of You & Me is H2O by Berton, the first underwater restaurant supervised by a Michelin-starred Chef. Here, guests can indulge in Michelin-star level cuisine while enjoying an immersive dining experience surrounded by the captivating underwater world.



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## EVENTS &amp; AWARDS

# Food & Beverage Show 2024 Wraps Up with Over 10,000 Visitors



Beverage Show 2024, demonstrating their commitment to fostering culinary excellence. Joining them were Co-Sponsors MHA Pvt Ltd and Nestle' Professional Maldives.

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 thanked all the culinary enthusiasts, professional chefs, food business owners, and those passionate about the realm of food and beverages who participated and visited the expo. The Food & Beverage Show 2024 provides a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the finest flavors, explore innovative products, and connect with current industry leaders.

The highly anticipated 7th edition of Food & Beverage Show commenced on January 18 with a special opening ceremony at 1430 hrs with senior Government officials, Ambassadors and industry stakeholders.

Organized by Highrise Pvt Ltd, Food & Beverage Show was held from January 18 - 20, 2024 with over 35 exhibitors who presented a diverse range of innovative beverages and delectable treats, fitting the taste of Maldives as well as industry related products from domestic and international suppliers and manufacturers. The exhibition attracted over 10,000 visitors.

Visitors to the stalls participated in various exciting activities and won special prizes through lucky draws held by the exhibitors.

BHM Traders, a leading name in the industry, took center stage as the Main Sponsor for the Food &





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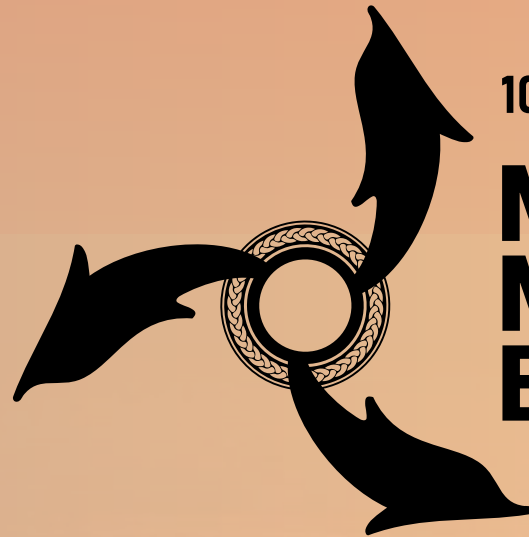
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IN THE NEWS

# President Mohamed Muizzu Unveils Visionary Transformation for Velana International Airport



In a momentous announcement, President Mohamed Muizzu reveals an ambitious vision for the future of Velana International Airport (VIA), marking a historic chapter in the Maldives' aviation landscape.

The project inauguration was made in a special ceremony at Dharubaaruge venue

in the capital city of Male. The ceremony was attended by Cabinet Ministers, Parliament members, Ambassadors of foreign countries, Company, and Institution heads along with MACL senior staff. During the ceremony along with the President, Economic Minister Mr. Mohamed Saeed and Maldives Airports Company CEO & MD Mr. Ibrahim Shareef

Mohamed also gave their speeches on the occasion.

The initial phase of VIA's development is on track for completion, with the opening of a new terminal later this year accommodating 7.3 million passengers. President Muizzu's vision sets a target of 25 million passengers over the next two decades.

The new project includes a new domestic terminal, capable of handling 2000 passengers per hour, a notable increase from its current capacity of 300 per hour. Simultaneously, a dedicated terminal for low-cost carriers with a capacity of 1000 people per hour is planned. Additionally, a seaplane terminal on the nearby island of Furaanafushi is set to be developed, providing space for more operators in the country.

Beyond terminal expansions, facilities to support increased operational capacity are planned. This encompasses the expansion of the fuel farm from 15 million

liters to 45 million liters and a subsequent increase to 100 million liters with the newly unveiled plan. Cargo handling capacity is expected to rise from the recently developed 100 thousand metric tonnes to 300,000 metric tonnes by the completion of the next phase.

Furthermore, a Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facility adhering to EASA standards will be established. The expansion project will introduce various new facilities and services. A significant feature is the creation of a special economic zone for VIA, with Funadhoo Island developed as a transit hub for VIA passengers. Modern airport services, including transit hotels, shopping centers, restaurants, and necessary amenities, will be implemented. The transit hub and seaplane terminal island will be linked to the main airport via a monorail system.

President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's visionary plan underscores his commitment to propelling the Maldives to new heights and fostering economic development.

# Maldives Welcomes the First Direct Flight from Hong Kong to the Maldives Since 2020

Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC/Visit Maldives) welcomed the first direct flight from Hong Kong to the Maldives since 2020. Today, a special ceremony was held at Velana International Airport to mark the joyous occasion, commemorating the arrival of Hong Kong Airlines flight HX791 from Hong Kong International Airport, carrying tourists from this market to the Maldives.

The tourists were greeted with the traditional BoduBeru; a vibrant cultural performance, and presented with a special gift pack, including flowers. This celebration marks the return of tourists from Hong Kong Airlines to the Maldives, a significant event since the onset of the global pandemic. Dignitaries attended the event includes the Ambassador from the People's Republic of China to the Maldives, H.E Ambassador Ms. Wang Lixin, representatives from The Ministry of Tourism, Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL), Maldives Immigration, Maldives Customs Service, along with government-related enterprises & tourism associations in the Maldives.

China has long stood as one of the most significant markets to the Maldives tourism

industry. The resumption of direct flights from China to the Maldives on January 18, 2023, marked the end of a 3- year hiatus caused by border closure due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to 2020, the Chinese market consistently topped the arrival charts to the Maldives. In the preceding year, Maldives welcomed over 187,118 tourists from China, firmly securing its position as one of the top three source markets for the Maldives. Since the reopening of borders, there has been a steady rise in arrival numbers.

Hong Kong remains an important market within this region. The establishment of direct connectivity from Hong Kong is anticipated to contribute to the continued growth in the number of arrivals.

MMPRC consistently promotes the Maldives as the top destination in the Chinese market through strategic marketing activities. In 2023, MMPRC conducted successful joint online promotions and familiarization trips. Notably, Maldives achieved its highest-ever tourist arrivals last year, surpassing 1.8 million tourists. Furthermore, the Maldives secured the prestigious title of 'World's Leading



Destination' for the fourth consecutive year at the 2023 World Travel Awards. MMPRC was honored as the 'World's Leading Tourist Board' for the second consecutive year. Adding to these accolades, the Maldives received the newly introduced Global Tourism Resilience Award for its capacity to recover swiftly and thrive after disruptions. These victories signify a remarkable triumph for the Maldives' tourism sector, underscoring our destinations' outstanding position in the global tourism landscape and the enduring appeal of the Sunny Side of Life to travelers worldwide.

MMPRC has a host of exciting activities lined up for the Chinese market this year, encompassing an e-learning campaign, digital promotions on leading Chinese apps, outdoor marketing initiatives, joint promotional campaigns, familiarization trips, social media campaigns, and active participation in fairs and exhibitions. The resumption of flights and targeted marketing activities in the Chinese market are poised to generate positive outcomes for the Maldives tourism industry, solidifying the Maldives as the most preferred destination in the minds of Chinese travelers.



# The Hawks Fuel Hulhumale Announce Special Promotion for its 1st Year Anniversary!



In its first year of service, Hawks Fuel Hulhumale is celebrating a milestone with a special promotion for its valued customers. Running from January 16 to February 29, 2024, customers who top up their Smart

Fuel cards with a minimum of MVR 500 are eligible to receive an entry coupon.

The grand prize, A brand-new Honda Air Blade 125 Black Edition provided

by Sheesha the sole authorized distributor of Honda in Maldives.

The second prize is a luxurious two-night all-inclusive stay for two at a premium hotel in Kamadhoo, Clarks Exotica Hotel.

Mr. Hussain Aman, General Manager and Director of Sales & Marketing at Hawks Pvt Ltd, stated, "We are deeply humbled by the unwavering support we have received from our community in our inaugural year."

Hawks Hulhumale Fuel Station began its journey offering a comprehensive range of services, including manned and self-service fuel facilities, automatic motorbike and car wash, a convenience store, and the first-ever prepaid touch-and-go card for effortless fuel



payments.

For additional details regarding the offer, visit: <https://thehawks.biz/>

# TaZa Brand Launches Mobile Application and Corporate Website for Seamless Ordering and Delivery Services

Island Beverage Maldives (IBM), the proud home of the renowned TaZa brand, announces the official release of its highly anticipated mobile application and corporate website. The TaZa App is set to revolutionize the customer experience by providing a convenient platform for users to place orders, schedule deliveries, and enjoy an effortless doorstep delivery service.

The official launch event for the TaZa App took place at Meerumaa, inaugurated by Chief Guest, Abdul Matheen Mohamed, Chairman of IBM and Ali Azim, General Manager. The event showcased the commitment of IBM to continuously improve and enhance the customer experience. With a focus on delivering high-quality waters for consumption, IBM aims to set new standards in the industry.

"At IBM, we are dedicated to offering our customers the best possible experience, and the TaZa App is a testament to that commitment. This application not only streamlines the ordering and delivery process but also provides a platform for our valued customers to explore and access a variety of IBM products conveniently," said Ahmed Anwar, Managing Director



at IBM.

The TaZa App introduces a user-friendly interface that empowers customers to effortlessly navigate through a range of IBM products available for order and delivery. One of the standout features of the application is its real-time order tracking functionality, allowing customers to stay informed about the status of their orders every step of the way.

To access the TaZa App, customers can simply download it from the Play Store and Apple Store from January 18 onwards. The registration process is seamless, requiring only a mobile number for user verification. Once registered, users gain access to a world of convenience and efficiency, making their interactions with TaZa products a breeze.

IBM encourages all customers to download the TaZa App and experience the future of seamless ordering and delivery services. Embrace the convenience, track your orders in real-time, and enjoy the excellence that the TaZa brand and IBM strive to deliver.



BON APPÉTIT

# Falooda Mousse Cake



*I'm a 22 year old with a love & passion for cooking & baking that has taken me through many culinary adventures starting from a basic Cake Course from my relative at the age of 14, to being a student at FHTS,Maldives National University, to training & working in the resort sector to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a Chef.*

*After serving more than 3 years in the resort industry, i am currently running my own online business from home, where I get to experiment and use my knowledge from my past experiences to create fun & delicious desserts & baked goods for everyone. Here's a recipe I came up with while experimenting with pantry ingredients you can find in almost any Maldivian home.*

Falooda is a popular ice cream dessert made with vermicelli, jelly, rose syrup, sbja seeds, milk and ice cream. Also spelled as ‘Falida’, it is popular in India, Pakistan and the middle-east. Similar versions of this dessert are popular across Asian countries and is known by different names. This recipe is largely inspired by the Falooda drink that originated from the Indian subcontinent & is a popular drink in many maldivian households during the month of Ramazan.

- INGRIDENTS:**
- Sponge base:**
- 3 whole eggs
  - 75g sugar
  - 80g all purpose flour
  - 1/2 teaspoon of strawberry essence and a drop of pink food color.
  - 5-6 Thinly sliced Strawberries (optional)

- METHOD:**
1. Prepare a sheet pan by lining with parchment paper or little bit of butter & flour.
  2. Preheat the oven to 180 degrees.
  3. Beat the eggs & sugar in a grease free bowl by hand or electric mixer until pale yellow & increased in volume to become fluffy & airy. Add in the essence & food coloring.
  4. Sieve in the flour and fold using a spatula.
  5. Pour onto the baking sheet and spread evenly careful not to handle the batter too much as it'll remove air bubbles.
  6. Bake at 100-150 degrees for 20-30 minutes or until you press the top with a finger and the sponge bounces back instead of creating a dent.
  7. Let the sponge cool and arrange a layer of thinly sliced fresh strawberries on top the sponge (this is optional for added freshness & texture)

- INGRIDENTS:**
- Falooda Mousse:**
- 1 cup of heavy sweetened whipping cream
  - 1/3 cup Condensed milk (or adjust to taste)
  - 1 tbs of water
  - 1 1/2 teaspoons of gelatin
  - 1/3 cup Rose Syrup

- METHOD:**
1. Let the gelatin bloom in room temperature water
  2. In a bowl, mix in the rose syrup & condensed milk.
  3. In a separate bowl Whip the heavy cream using electric mixer until it forms stiff peaks.
  4. Using a spatula Fold in the rose syrup & condensed milk mixture slowly into the whipped cream.
  5. Microwave the bloomed gelatin, mix & add slowly into the mousse mixture while folding.
  6. Immediately pour the mousse over cooled sponge layer.
  7. Set in the chiller for a minimum of 2-3 hours.

- INGRIDENTS:**
- Chia Jelly:**
- 5g of chia seeds
  - 1/3 cup of water
  - 1/2 teaspoon of agar agar or unflavored gelatin

- METHOD:**
1. Bloom the chia seeds in water until it thickens and forms a gel.
  2. Bloom the gelatin in water
  3. Once the chia has bloomed, microwave the gelatin & mix into the chia.
  4. Once the jelly has cooled to room temperature slowly pour over the mousse over a spoon careful not to make dents on the mousse surface.
  5. Let this set in the chiller for another 30 minutes to 1 hour.

**Cut & serve with fresh strawberry, ice cream, or edible rose.**

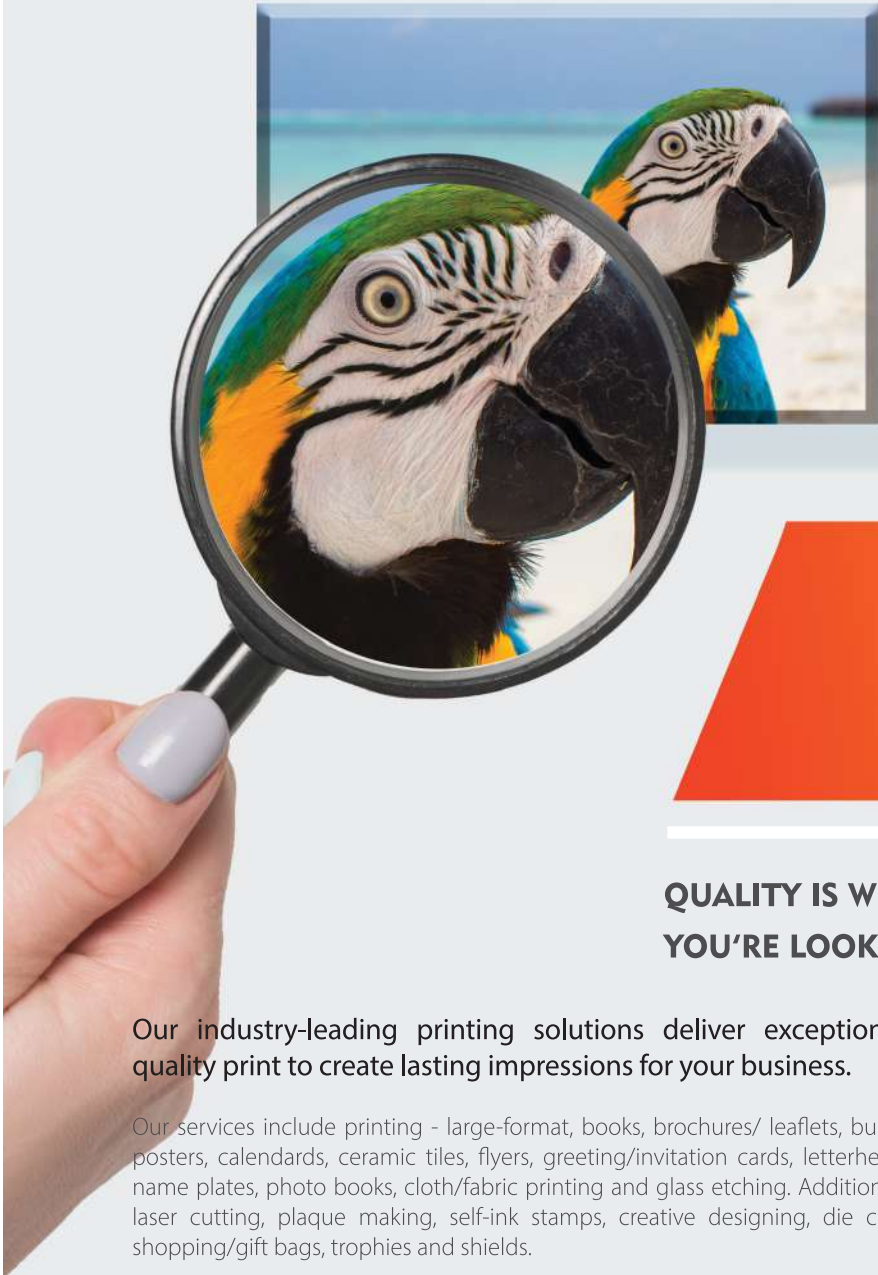


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# Frankly Speaking

Russia has become the dominant market for tourist arrivals in the Maldives. What do you think are the key reasons for this trend, and how might it evolve in the coming months?



**Mohamed Firaq**  
Founder & CEO  
Inner Maldives

The surge in Russian tourists to the Maldives could be attributed to factors like improved relations, increased flight connectivity, and promotional efforts. The trend might continue if these factors persist, but external influences like geopolitical changes or global events could impact it. As Russians choose destinations which they feel safer in like the Maldives. However, what we can work on is the issue of payments.



**Fathmath Muslifa**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Beehive Hotels

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, they ranked among the top 10 highest spenders in global tourism. In 2024, as anticipated, circumstances are beginning to stabilize. It appears that the intensity of conflicts has somewhat diminished, prompting them to resume spending. With strategic marketing efforts that address the prevailing challenges, we have the opportunity not only to maintain their patronage but also to attract additional visitors.



**Ahmed Shafee**  
Founder & Managing Partner  
Maldives Island Realty

I personally believe that the diligent efforts of tour operators and PR firms are shaping an image of paradise islands in the hearts and minds of the Russian market. I foresee further expansion, with increased arrivals substantiating this belief.



**Ibrahim Nizam**  
Brand Strategist  
Hospitality Consultant

The key reason for the increasing dominance of the Russian market in the Maldives can be linked to the marketing efforts of the Maldives and strategic partnerships established by the Maldivian travel agents and tour operators with their Russian counterparts. These collaborations have effectively positioned the Maldives as a top-of-mind destination for Russian travelers, offering tailored vacation packages and unique experiences that cater to their preferences.

Looking ahead, the trend may continue to evolve as the Maldives works towards diversifying its tourism offerings to attract a wider range of travelers from Russia. Moreover, the implementation of more attractive promotional campaigns, and increasing the frequency and number of direct flights between Russia and the Maldives can further bolster the appeal of the Maldives as a favored destination for Russian tourists.

At the same time, identifying and adapting to changing consumer preferences and external influences will play a crucial role in sustaining and potentially expanding the Russian tourist market in the Maldives.



**Mohamed Khaleel**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Manta Air

There are many factors why Russia continues to be a dominant market for the Maldives.

1. Ease of travel to Maldives for Russians; they find it difficult to travel to many parts of the world and Maldives is one country they can travel to easily.
2. Exotic appeal: The Maldives' pristine beaches, clear waters, and overwater bungalows, etc, offer a unique and exotic vacation experience, attracting Russian travelers seeking luxury and natural beauty.
3. Affordability: The popularity of all-inclusive Guest Houses in the Maldives resonates well with Russian tourists, providing a hassle-free and comprehensive vacation package.

As travel patterns are influenced by a myriad of factors, a comprehensive approach considering geopolitical, economic, and cultural dynamics will be essential for predicting and responding to the evolving trends in the coming months.

We are not yet getting the full benefit of the market and focused marketing activities can increase the market share much further.



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