

The islandchief

travel news

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Exploring the Depths

with

Shifau Umar

General Manager, Whale Submarine Maldives

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Australia–Maldives
Direct Flights Begin



Maldivian has launched the first-ever direct flight service between Melbourne and Malé, marking a major step in strengthening travel and tourism ties between Australia and the Maldives. Operated by Maldivian’s Airbus A330, the route provides the first nonstop air connection between the two countries.

Flights from Malé to Melbourne will operate every Sunday, while flights from Melbourne to Malé will operate every Tuesday. The inaugural arrival at Velana International Airport was celebrated with a ceremonial water salute, cultural performances, and commemorative gifts for passengers.

Maldivian Managing Director Ibrahim Iyas described the launch as a defining moment for both the airline and the Maldives’ aviation industry, highlighting new opportunities for tourism, trade, and bilateral relations.

To support the route, Visit Maldives Corporation has partnered with Maldivian to promote the destination across the Oceania market and increase awareness of the new direct connection.

As part of these efforts, Visit Maldives Corporation has also partnered with Luxury Escapes Pty Ltd to expand destination marketing across Australia and New Zealand through digital campaigns, travel trade engagement, media initiatives, webinars, and travel agent training programmes.

The Melbourne–Malé route is expected to improve accessibility for Australian travellers while strengthening the Maldives’ presence in key international tourism markets.

Vietnam Airlines Starts Colombo – Ho Chi Minh City Flights

Vietnam’s national carrier, Vietnam Airlines, has officially announced the launch of direct flights between Colombo and Ho Chi Minh City, marking a major milestone in strengthening tourism, trade, investment, and connectivity between Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

The announcement was made during the Vietnam –Sri Lanka Trade, Investment and Tourism Cooperation Forum held in Colombo, in the presence of His Excellency Tô Lâm, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and the President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and Hon. Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, alongside senior government officials and business leaders from both countries.

Scheduled to commence in October 2026, the new direct service will operate three weekly flights between Colombo and Ho Chi Minh City using Airbus A321 aircraft. The route is expected to significantly enhance travel convenience for passengers while opening up new opportunities for tourism, business travel, trade, and cargo movement between the two countries.

Through Ho Chi Minh City, Sri Lankan travellers will gain seamless access to



Vietnam Airlines’ extensive international network across Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Australia, and other global destinations.

Prior to the occasion of the route launch, Vietnam Airlines and Saigontourist Group signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Hayleys Group, the Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka (TAASL), and the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO) to strengthen tourism promotion, destination marketing, and visitor exchanges between Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Vietnam Airlines is represented in Sri Lanka by the Hayleys Group as its General Sales Agent (GSA).

Đặng Ngọc Hòa, Chairman of Vietnam Airlines, stated:

“The launch of the HCM City–Colombo route marks an important milestone in aviation cooperation between Vietnam and Sri Lanka. By enhancing direct connectivity, the new service will facilitate trade, investment, and tourism activities, while strengthening Vietnam’s links with South Asia and supporting the continued growth of bilateral passenger traffic.”

The launch of the direct route represents the first nonstop air connection between Sri Lanka and Vietnam and is expected to further strengthen bilateral relations while supporting continued growth in tourism, trade, and commerce between the two nations.



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Emirates Unveils a Striking New UAE Flag Livery on its A380

Emirates has introduced a new aircraft livery featuring a large UAE flag across the fuselage of its Airbus A380, the world's largest passenger aircraft. Displayed on aircraft A6-EVG, the design extends the airline's well-known tail branding and serves as a tribute to the unity, ambition and identity of the UAE.

The unveiling forms part of Emirates' "This Flag Will Always Fly" campaign, launched in response to a national call by HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai. The initiative encouraged citizens and residents to raise the UAE flag as a symbol of solidarity, shared responsibility and national pride during challenging times.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates airline and Group, said the airline was honoured to answer



the call to celebrate the UAE flag. He noted that Emirates aircraft have carried the national flag since the airline's beginnings and described the new livery as a way of paying tribute to a country that has played a central role

in the airline's growth and success.

The aircraft design showcases the UAE flag in a striking 3D style, flowing across both sides of the A380 in bold national colours. The specially painted aircraft

has already operated flights to destinations including New York and Brisbane and is expected to appear on more A380 routes across the Emirates network.

Emirates also revealed plans to introduce the flag-themed design on one of its Boeing 777 aircraft, the second-largest commercial passenger aircraft after the A380. The airline emphasised that the UAE flag remains a defining feature of its fleet, prominently displayed on the tail of every aircraft flying across global destinations.

This is not the first time Emirates has used special liveries to mark important moments in the UAE's history. In 2017, the airline honoured the late HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan with a commemorative design on its 100th A380 as part of the "Year of Zayed," while also launching dedicated liveries on 40 aircraft to celebrate Expo 2020 Dubai.

Gulf Air Expands Premium Offering in Strategic Partnership with beOnd



Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and beOnd, the world's first premium leisure airline, announced a strategic partnership to redefine the premium travel experience for passengers flying across both airlines' networks.

By uniting Gulf Air's established global network with beOnd's distinctive leisure-focused offering, the agreement opens new journey possibilities and elevates connectivity

for travellers seeking a premium, end-to-end travel experience. The partnership enables customers to book and travel seamlessly across an expanded range of connected routes.

The agreement was formalised at a signing ceremony held in Bahrain at the Bahrain National Theatre, attended by H.E. Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Minister of Transportation and Telecommunication, Mr. Khalid Taqi, Chairman of Gulf Air Group, along with

senior government and industry officials. The milestone reflects a shared commitment to delivering an elevated passenger journey – from the moment of booking through to arrival – underpinned by coordinated customer experience practices and a unified standard of premium hospitality

Gulf Air Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Martin Gauss, stated: "We are proud to launch this partnership with beOnd and to bring our customers an even richer travel experience. As Bahrain's national carrier, with a heritage spanning more than 75 years, Gulf Air has always placed the passenger at the heart of everything we do. This partnership deepens that commitment, combining the strength of our global network with beOnd's exceptional leisure proposition to create journeys that are truly memorable."

beOnd Chief Executive Officer and Chairman, Mr. Tero Taskila,

commented: "Bahrain holds a unique place in the story of aviation – a region where the history of flight stretches back more than a century, and where the ambition has never stood still. The Bahrain National Aviation Strategy reflects that same forward momentum: a clear commitment to connectivity, high-value tourism, and a premium travel experience worthy of the Kingdom's standing. Through our partnership with Gulf Air, beOnd is proud to play a part in that future – bringing a differentiated, all-premium leisure experience to Bahrain and connecting the Kingdom to the travellers it deserves. Together, we are building something that feels both grounded in this place and genuinely new."

The partnership reinforces both airlines' strategic priorities: growing premium leisure travel, driving inbound tourism, and cementing Bahrain's standing as a world-class destination and a leading hub for travellers across the region and beyond.



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Meyyafushi Maldives Brings ‘Kindness to the Environment’ to Life Through Solar Energy

Meyyafushi Maldives, the latest luxury resort by BeKind Hospitality Group, has completed a major solar energy project as part of its commitment to sustainable hospitality. Located amid the Maldives’ turquoise waters, the resort is embracing renewable energy solutions to support a more environmentally responsible future.

The project features the installation of a 1-megawatt solar panel system supported by an advanced battery backup system. This infrastructure is designed to strengthen the resort’s use of renewable energy while improving energy efficiency and long-term operational resilience across the island.

Installed across key operational areas, the solar system is expected to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, lower

carbon emissions, and expand the use of clean energy throughout the resort. The initiative reflects a broader vision for hospitality in the Maldives where sustainability, innovation, and guest experience work together.

Ahmed Siaar, Cluster General Manager of Meyyafushi Maldives, said the resort was designed from the outset to balance modern development with respect for the country’s natural environment. He described the solar investment as one of the resort’s most meaningful initiatives, benefiting not only current operations but also future generations who will experience the islands.

The solar project forms part of BeKind Hospitality’s wider sustainability strategy, which focuses on environmental responsibility, community wellbeing, guest experiences, and staff welfare. The



group’s commitment to renewable energy extends beyond Meyyafushi, with sister property Fushifaru Maldives also incorporating solar power into its sustainability initiatives.

In addition to renewable energy efforts, Meyyafushi Maldives continues to promote coral restoration, marine conservation, reduced single-use

plastics, and locally inspired experiences supported by environmentally conscious practices. As the Maldives develops further as a luxury tourism destination, the resort hopes its solar initiative will encourage future hospitality projects to prioritise long-term sustainability and environmental stewardship.

Sun, Surf, and Serenity, Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives Unveils Exclusive Surf Offer



Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives has introduced its new Surf & Relax Offer, inviting travellers to experience a blend of surfing, wellness, dining, and island adventures. Designed to reflect the resort’s “Time & Space Redefined” philosophy, the package combines excitement and relaxation for both seasoned surfers and beginners seeking a unique Maldivian escape.

Situated in North Malé Atoll, just 30 minutes by speedboat from Velana International Airport, Kuda Villingili is home to Chicken’s Break, the Maldives’ longest left-hand barrel wave. This reputation as a premier surf destination forms the backdrop of the new offer, which is tailored to provide guests with a seamless balance of thrill and tranquillity.

Available for direct bookings through the resort’s website until 31 October 2026 using the code KVSURF, the package applies to stays of at least four nights in Beach Villas with Private Pool and Water Villas with Private Pool, including Sunrise and Sunset categories. Guests booking these villas will receive USD 100 in resort credit per villa, while stays of seven nights or more qualify for USD 300 in total resort credit to be used for dining, spa treatments, and excursions.

The offer also includes complimentary return shared speedboat transfers, daily breakfast at The Restaurant, and three-course dinners across five signature dining venues — SPICE, EAST, EARTH, FIRE, and OCEAN. Guests can additionally enjoy a one-time three-course dining experience at the award-winning Mar-Umi restaurant, known for its Japanese-Peruvian cuisine, while further dining at the venue comes with a 15 percent discount under the Half Board plan.

Wellness and island exploration form another key part of the experience. Guests will receive a 60-minute Deep Tissue Massage per adult at the resort’s private island spa, alongside activities including the KV Faru snorkelling excursion, a traditional sunset fishing trip, and a cocktail-making class at Raalhu Bar overlooking the surf.

For surfing enthusiasts, the package offers 15 percent savings on surfboard rentals, surf photography, and surf trips to nearby breaks such as Cokes, Lohis, Sultans, Jails, and Ninjas. Beginner surfers can benefit from 25 percent discounts on beach and water lessons, while complimentary early check-in and late check-out, subject to availability, further add convenience to the experience. Through the Surf & Relax Offer, Kuda Villingili aims to present a Maldives experience where adventure, wellness, and island living come together effortlessly.

Centara Mirage Lagoon Maldives Launches The Mirage Escape Package for Island Daycations



Located within The Atollia by Centara Hotels & Resorts, Centara Mirage Lagoon Maldives, an underwater-themed, family-focused resort, invites guests to rediscover the joy of island living with the

launch of The Mirage Escape Package, a thoughtfully curated day experience designed for families, friends, colleagues, and those seeking a refreshing change of pace surrounded by turquoise waters

and vibrant island energy.

Set within a lagoon setting, the experience blends leisure, dining, relaxation, and shared moments into one seamless day by the sea. Guests are welcomed to enjoy sun-filled hours across the resort’s expansive recreational spaces, from its signature lazy river and water park to relaxed beachfront settings designed for connection and effortless island enjoyment.

At the heart of the experience is a leisurely lunch buffet at The Sailhouse, complemented by two rounds of beverages, along with water, coffee, and tea during meals. Guests also enjoy full access to the resort’s family-friendly facilities, including the swimming pool, lazy river, and water park, alongside exclusive savings on food and beverage

experiences throughout the day.

For those looking to elevate their escape further, SPA Cenvaree offers a 60-minute Balinese Massage at a special rate, creating a moment of calm and restoration within the island setting. Day-use rooms are also available at an additional rate for added comfort and privacy, while groups of 20 guests or more will enjoy one complimentary day-use room as part of the experience.

To ensure a seamless journey, complimentary return ferry transfers are included, offering convenient access between Malé and the resort.

The Mirage Escape Package is priced at USD 110 net per person, with special pricing for children aged 6 to 11 years at 50% off the adult rate. Valid until 31 July 2026.

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Lily Hotels Promotes Ali Arushad and Sonu Singh to Key Leadership Roles at Lily Beach Resort & Spa

Lily Hotels has announced the promotions of Ali Arushad to Executive Assistant Manager – Rooms and Sonu Singh to Front Office Manager, recognising their commitment, leadership, and valuable contributions to both the resort and the wider hospitality sector.

Arushad's appointment marks another milestone in a hospitality career that started as a receptionist. Through determination and a strong focus on guest service, he advanced through several operational positions, including In-Villa Dining, Front Office Supervisor, Assistant Front Office Manager, and Butler Manager at Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa, before joining Lily Beach Resort & Spa as Front Office Manager.

Working alongside General Manager Laurent Driole, Arushad has contributed significantly to improving guest experiences and boosting in-resort sales. His steady career progression

reflects Lily Hotels' commitment to developing talent and supporting employees through meaningful growth opportunities. Arushad said he remains focused on working with his team to deliver memorable and high-quality guest experiences.

Sonu Singh's journey within the Front Office department reflects years of growth, dedication, and continuous learning. Beginning with a desire to gain experience, he gradually built a rewarding career through various departmental roles, strengthening his skills in leadership, communication, teamwork, and operations management.

Known for his professionalism and commitment to improvement, Sonu has consistently focused on building positive relationships with guests and colleagues while delivering excellent service. In his new role as Front Office Manager, he aims to further elevate



Ali Arushad

guest experiences while embracing new developments within the hospitality industry. Sonu said he values creating welcoming environments, supporting colleagues, and continuing to develop his skills for the benefit of the organisation.

Lily Beach Resort & Spa, located in Ari Atoll, remains one of the Maldives' leading luxury all-inclusive resorts, recognised for its award-winning



Sonu Singh

Platinum Plan and exceptional guest experiences. As a home-grown hospitality brand, Lily Hotels continues to invest in employee growth through training, mentorship, and leadership opportunities while maintaining high standards in innovation and guest satisfaction. The latest promotions highlight the company's ongoing commitment to recognising talent and strengthening its position as a leading hospitality brand in the Maldives.

City of Dreams Sri Lanka Appoints Chef Ye Panwang to Lead Chinese Culinary



City of Dreams Sri Lanka has appointed Chef Ye Panwang as Chef de Cuisine, bringing more than 20 years of international culinary experience to its growing dining portfolio. His arrival further reinforces the destination's commitment to delivering world-class

gastronomy and luxury hospitality experiences.

Chef Panwang will oversee the culinary vision of Spice 8, the resort's signature Pan-Asian restaurant. With extensive expertise in both traditional and modern

Chinese cuisine, he is expected to enhance the restaurant's offerings and create memorable dining experiences for both local and international guests.

His appointment represents another milestone in City of Dreams Sri Lanka's efforts to establish itself as South Asia's leading integrated luxury resort. By attracting internationally recognised culinary talent, the destination continues to strengthen its reputation for exceptional hospitality and fine dining.

Originally from Bengbu City in Anhui Province, China, Chef Panwang has built a distinguished global career working with renowned hospitality brands and luxury resorts. His professional journey includes senior culinary roles at The Kingsbury Colombo, The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort, Narcissus Hotel and Resort, and several high-end properties across the Maldives, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

Chef Panwang is widely recognised for his expertise across diverse Chinese culinary traditions, including Cantonese, Szechuan, Huaiyang, Beijing, Shanghai, and Hunan cuisines. Combining authentic techniques with contemporary presentation, he creates dishes that balance visual appeal with rich flavours. His skills in food artistry, including fruit and vegetable carving and sculptural presentation, add a creative and theatrical element to his culinary style.

At Spice 8, guests can look forward to an elevated dining experience that celebrates Asian flavours while introducing innovative interpretations aligned with the resort's luxury identity. As City of Dreams Sri Lanka continues to reshape Colombo's hospitality scene, Chef Panwang's appointment highlights its dedication to bringing globally respected talent to the destination and delivering unforgettable culinary experiences.

Banyan Tree Krabi Adds Indian Cuisine Specialist to the Mix



A new chef and specialist in Indian cuisine, Mr Chander Prakash, has joined the culinary team at Banyan Tree Krabi, and he fully intends to spice things up in the kitchen.

Chef Chander’s appointment at the Two-Key MICHELIN-listed beachfront

resort in Southern Thailand will add a new element of culinary expertise to the hotel’s dining outlet, The Naga Kitchen.

“I have been working in top-class kitchens at hotels and restaurants across India and Thailand for more than

10 years, specialising in North Indian cuisine,” said Chef Chander. “For me, cooking is more than just preparing food – it is about creating memorable dining experiences. I always focus on fresh ingredients, balanced flavors, and attention to detail in every dish. I am especially passionate about Indian curries, biryani, kebabs, tandoori specialties, and Arabic cuisine.”

Chandler said that his culinary journey began with a passion for traditional spices and the art of tandoor cooking. He modestly claims that his specialties include dishes such as dal makhani, Butter Chicken, and Paneer Butter Masala.

Chander comes to Banyan Tree Krabi from the 5-star Sinae Phuket where he was Indian and Arabic Chef, a title he previously held at the Keemala Hotel on

the same Thai island. His resumé also includes experiences at the Hotel Germanus Springs hotel in Kodaikanal and De Karavali restaurant in Bangalore where he honed his skills in Tandoor cooking.

“Chef Chander will help us expand our culinary identity with his expertise in authentic Indian cuisine,” said Ms Porntip Narangsiya, Banyan Tree Krabi’s Director of Food & Beverage. “Of course, visitors of all nationalities love Indian food, and we are especially privileged to welcome many guests from India, including large parties for beachfront weddings and celebrations. Now we can also offer an option of delicious Indian cuisine with a modern presentation, in addition to the existing Thai and international fare, and we believe this will create some memorable dining experiences for guests.”



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A Thoughtful Approach to Wellness at Javvu Spa, Amilla Maldives



Amilla Maldives introduces a thoughtfully curated wellness offering

at Javvu Spa, led by Dr. Shagnika Pradhan, a certified doctor in natural

therapies and a dedicated scholar of yogic philosophy.

With over a decade of experience, Dr. Shagnika brings a gentle, integrative approach to well-being, supporting guests through pain, stress, and sleep-related concerns. Her work weaves together Traditional Chinese Medicine, herbal remedies, lifestyle practices, and yoga therapy, creating personalised pathways that address the root of imbalance while nurturing long-term vitality and ease.

Dr. Shagnika will be in residence from 22 May to 7 June 2026, offering guests the opportunity to experience her integrative approach within the calm, natural rhythm of island life, including during the Eid Al Adha celebrations

from 27 to 30 May.

A curated menu of experiences includes Elemental Balance Acupuncture, Naturopathy Manipulative Therapy, Toksen Therapy, Cupping Therapy, Reiki Chakra Sound Healing, and Aqua Yoga. Each session is tailored through a private consultation, ensuring that every guest’s individual needs and natural rhythms are honoured. Set within the quiet rhythm of island life, these therapies invite guests to slow down and reconnect, guided by treatments that are both considered and restorative.

For those seeking shared moments of stillness, group sessions in chanting and sound healing meditation offer a gentle space for connection and reflection.



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Milaidhoo Maldives Marks Global Wellness Day 2026

Milaidhoo Maldives invites guests to celebrate Global Wellness Day 2026 under the theme “#JoyMagenta”, embracing its signature wellbeing philosophy built around three interconnected pillars: food, physical balance and peace of mind. Nestled within the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of the Baa Atoll, the island offers a sanctuary where nature-led experiences, mindful nourishment and restorative practices come together to support holistic wellbeing.

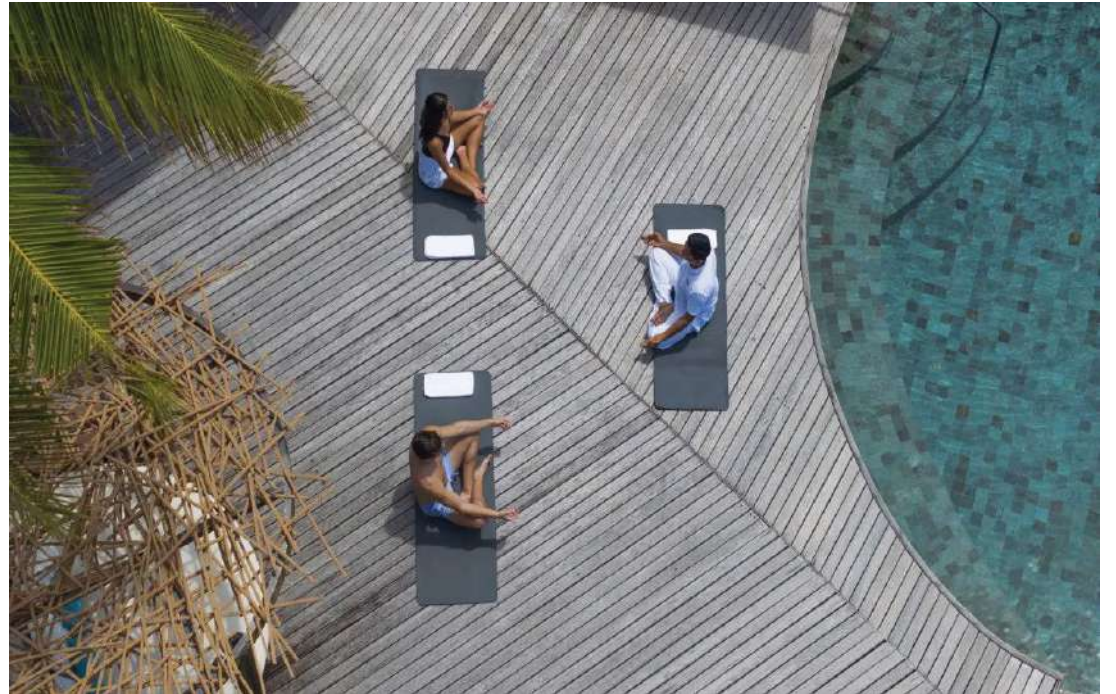
Throughout the day, guests are guided through immersive experiences designed to awaken gratitude, creativity, connection and movement, each reflecting Milaidhoo’s commitment to wellbeing in harmony with the oceanic environment.

Morning begins with Gratitude on the Compass Pool Bar deck, where mindfulness meditation and breathwork invite stillness and clarity. Mid-morning, Creativity unfolds at Serenity Spa with a DIY coconut scrub workshop using natural island

ingredients, celebrating sustainable self-care and the island’s nourishing food philosophy through the use of locally inspired botanicals.

Mid-afternoon brings Connection at the overwater Yoga Pavilion with couples stretching and sound healing sessions designed to deepen presence and emotional harmony. As evening approaches, Movement takes place during a sunset Vinyasa yoga flow at Ocean Stories Beach, where breath, motion and ocean rhythm align.

Throughout the experience, Milaidhoo’s culinary wellbeing approach complements the journey, with mindful dining options that emphasise fresh, locally inspired and nutritionally balanced cuisine to support physical vitality and inner peace. Food is presented not only as nourishment but also as a sensory extension of the island’s healing environment,



reinforcing the connection between body and nature.

Milaidhoo Maldives’ Global Wellness Day celebration reflects the island’s deeper philosophy of holistic living, where food, physical movement and peace of mind are seamlessly integrated into every guest experience. The island’s intimate setting encourages reconnection with nature and self, allowing each moment

to be experienced with intention and joy.

The day concludes with a renewed sense of vitality, emotional balance and calm presence, embodying the essence of “joy” that defines this year’s theme. Milaidhoo continues to place well-being at the heart of its experience, ensuring every stay supports lasting harmony in one of the world’s most tranquil island sanctuaries.

Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives’ Chavana Spa Enhances Island Health with Hyperice



Chavana Spa at Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives has introduced a new Recovery experience in partnership with Hyperice, a globally recognized leader in performance recovery technology. Designed for active travelers, surfers, and wellness-focused

guests, the initiative enhances the spa’s traditional wellness offerings by incorporating advanced recovery solutions that support movement, relaxation, and overall well being.

As part of the Mandara Spa family and

inspired by Balinese healing traditions, Chavana Spa is responding to evolving guest needs shaped by long-haul travel, active lifestyles, and a growing focus on physical health.

The collaboration with Hyperice reflects the spa’s commitment to innovation, creating recovery-focused experiences that help guests transition from demanding activities into meaningful rejuvenation.

Located in one of the Maldives’ premier surf destinations, the partnership highlights the increasing importance of recovery within both wellness and surf culture. Drawing inspiration from the recovery philosophies embraced by athletes such as 11-time World Surf League Champion Kelly Slater, the new

offerings promote longevity, sustained performance, and physical wellbeing for surfers and travelers alike.

The Recovery experience features innovative treatments including Normatec Recovery Boots, which use dynamic air compression technology to improve circulation and reduce muscle fatigue, and the Quick Fix Muscle Release / Flight Recovery session, which utilizes Hypervolt percussion therapy to ease tension and restore mobility.

Together, these treatments represent Chavana Spa’s forward-looking approach to island wellness, blending its heritage with cutting-edge technology to deliver relevant and restorative experiences for modern guests.

From Sketch to Soulmates



In the Maldives, where island life is shaped by the sea and close-knit communities, the story of Shameen and Sheeneez reflects the power of creativity, resilience and shared purpose. Their journey as artists and partners highlights how passion, when nurtured with discipline and love, can grow into something that uplifts both individuals and communities.

Shameen’s artistic path began on a small island where formal training was unavailable. At just seven years old, a



challenge from his mother - to recreate a photograph using pencils marked his lifelong devotion to art. With no access to art schools, he became self-taught, relying on books, practice, and determination. Over time, he developed

a remarkable career spanning more than 30,000 works across multiple mediums, including pencil, water colour, acrylic, oil, and airbrush. His journey is a reminder that talent flourishes through patience, consistency, and belief in one’s purpose.

One of the most defining moments of his life took place in a library, where he met Sheeneez. What began as a portrait drawn in admiration turned into a lifelong bond after she reached out months later. Today, she is both his life partner and creative collaborator. While Shameen is known for realism and precision, Sheeneez brings a contemporary, expressive style, proving that artistic harmony lies in differences that complement one another.

Beyond their work, the couple is deeply



committed to mentoring young Maldivians. Through workshops and guidance, they encourage creativity as a meaningful form of expression and opportunity. They also emphasize sustainability - valuing mindful creation, reducing waste, and respecting the fragile island environment that inspires their work.

Their story is a testament to love, art, and responsibility, showing how creativity can shape not only lives, but also a more inspired and sustainable community.

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Mr. Arumugam Kuppan Mastry
Founder



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Founded by **Mr. Arumugam Kuppan Mastry**

A visionary builder with strong field expertise, he established the foundation of AmmA Groups through disciplined engineering practices and a reputation for dependable workmanship. During this formative period, he executed several significant commercial buildings across South India and successfully delivered projects for public-sector and institutional clients. His portfolio included construction works associated with government infrastructure such as bus terminals and facilities linked to public administration.

Through hands-on leadership, technical precision, and trust-based relationships, he laid the structural and ethical framework that continues to guide the organization today.

• Second Generation: **Mr. Nanda Kumaar Arumugam** transformed the organization into a diversified multi-group enterprise through innovative ideas and advanced technologies, formally shaping the modern AmmA Groups.

• Third Generation Leadership: **Mr. Monish Adhith** leads nationwide operations across India, while **Mr. Sanjith Sarvesh** manages procurement and Maldives projects.

• With its registered office in Tamil Nadu, India, AmmA Groups continues to uphold its founding values of quality, durability, and customer satisfaction.

Development into the Maldives

In Maldives Male, AmmA Groups is supported by one of the famous leading local construction companies **RCC - Rasheed Carpentry and Construction Pvt Ltd.** Through this collaboration, the Group has undertaken specialized structural rehabilitation works for island resort infrastructure, including: • Overwater villas / water villas • Walkway decks • Arrival jetties • Arrival pavilions • Service jetties Our solutions are backed by a lifetime guarantee for structural rehabilitation works.

In 2023, the Group expanded its global footprint by establishing operations in the Maldives through AmmA Tradder.



N⁵⁹ CORROS GUARD – Reinforcement Anti-Corrosion Protection. As part of our continuous innovation for aggressive marine environments, AmmA Groups is introducing N⁵⁹ CORROS GUARD, our proprietary reinforcement anti-corrosion protection system specially engineered for Maldives conditions. Designed to withstand high salinity, humidity, and coastal exposure, N⁵⁹ CORROS GUARD enhances structural durability, extends service life, and reduces longterm maintenance requirements.

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Exploring the Depths

with

Shifau Umar

General Manager,
Whale Submarine Maldives

“

The actual process of diving has become routine, but what never becomes routine is the anticipation of what our guests will experience during each dive.

I believe there is tremendous untapped potential in underwater tourism within the Maldives.”

For more than two decades, Shifau Umar has been at the heart of one of the Maldives' most unique tourism experiences, Whale Submarine Maldives. From joining the company as a Pilot Trainee in 2000 to leading it as General Manager today, his journey reflects dedication, resilience, and a passion for innovation in marine tourism.

In this edition of The Islandchief, Shifau shares his remarkable career story, the evolution of submarine tourism in the Maldives, memorable underwater encounters, and his vision for the future of underwater experiences in the country. He also offers valuable insights for young Maldivians aspiring to build careers in tourism and marine operations, highlighting the importance of embracing opportunities beyond conventional career paths.

How did your journey lead to Whale Submarine Maldives?

My professional journey began with Maldivian Air Taxi, where I worked in flight dispatch. At the time, my ambition was to become a cabin crew member. Although there were no available positions, I successfully completed the cabin crew training program and served as a standby crew member, which provided me with a few opportunities to fly.

However, I soon realized that a desk-based role was not where I saw my future. When I heard that a tourist submarine was being introduced to the Maldives, I became determined to be part of this unique venture. Through an opportunity that arose while my basketball coach, Mr. Umar, was involved with the project, I was selected as a Pilot Trainee for Whale Submarine Maldives.

The training was both challenging and demanding. It required extensive technical knowledge, operational expertise, and a significant commitment of time and effort. Looking back, it was not always an easy journey, but it was an invaluable learning experience. After two years of intensive training, I qualified as a Co-Pilot, followed by an

additional year of training before earning my certification as a Captain.

Since joining the company in 2000, I have held a variety of positions both onboard and ashore. Over the years, I have been actively involved in many aspects of the operation, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the business, and contributing to its continued success. My journey with Whale Submarine Maldives has been one of continuous learning, growth, and dedication to delivering a unique underwater experience to our guests.

What makes Whale Submarine different from other tourist activities?

Whale Submarine offers an experience that very few destinations in the world can provide. Unlike a boat excursion, diving trip, or underwater restaurants or observatory, Whale Submarine is a certified passenger submarine that takes guests beneath the ocean surface in complete safety and comfort.

What makes the experience truly unique is that it allows

anyone—regardless of age, swimming ability, or diving experience—to explore the underwater world firsthand. Guests can observe vibrant coral reefs, marine life, and the beauty of the ocean from within a climate-controlled submarine while remaining completely dry.

In addition to its uniqueness, Whale Submarine combines adventure, education, and accessibility, making it an unforgettable experience for families, couples, and visitors seeking something beyond traditional tourism activities. As one of the very few commercial tourist submarines operating globally, it offers a rare opportunity to discover the Maldives from an entirely different perspective.

What are some of the most memorable marine life encounters guests have experienced during submarine dives?

Over the years, Whale Submarine has been fortunate to encounter nearly every type of marine life commonly found in Maldivian waters. While it is impossible to see all of them on a single dive, each excursion offers the potential for unique and memorable sightings.

Guests have enjoyed close-up views of vibrant coral reefs, schools of tropical fish, reef sharks, stingrays, eagle rays, sea turtles, moray eels, and a wide variety of other marine species.

What makes every dive unique is that no two underwater journeys are ever the same. The ocean is constantly changing, and each dive presents a different combination of marine life and underwater scenery. This sense of discovery is one of the reasons guests often describe their submarine experience as a highlight of their visit to the Maldives sometimes.

Safety is a major concern for many first-time guests. What measures are in place to ensure passenger safety during dives?

Safety is our priority, and the submarine is designed with substantial safety margins built into every aspect of its operation. The submarine is certified and engineered to operate at depths of up to 150 meters, while our passenger dives are conducted at approximately 45 meters. This means we operate well within the vessel's design limits, providing a significant safety margin during every dive.

In addition to the vessel's robust construction, all dives are carried out in accordance with operational procedures and maintenance standards. The submarine undergoes inspections, preventative maintenance, and comprehensive safety checks before operations. Throughout the dive, the submarine's systems are continuously monitored to ensure safe and comfortable operation.

With more than two decades of successful operations and thousands of passenger dives, Whale Submarine has maintained an excellent safety record, providing guests with a unique underwater experience they can enjoy with confidence and peace of mind.

What's a typical day like for you as General Manager?

As General Manager, no two days are exactly the same, but my primary focus is ensuring the safe, efficient, and reliable operation of the submarine service.

A typical day involves overseeing daily operations, coordinating schedules, and ensuring that all activities are carried out according to established safety and operational standards. A significant part of my role is dedicated to planning and monitoring routine maintenance to keep the submarine and its support systems in optimal condition.

I am also responsible for managing spare parts procurement, ensuring that critical components and supplies are available when needed to minimize downtime and maintain operational readiness. In addition, I address any challenges, support long-term planning, and continuously improve the guest experience.

Having been involved in various aspects of the operation for many years, I strive to balance operational efficiency, technical reliability, and exceptional customer service every day.

Outside of work, do you personally enjoy ocean-related activities like diving, fishing, or snorkeling?

Surprisingly, not really. While I have spent much of my professional life underwater, my interests outside of work are quite different.

I enjoy playing sports and staying active, as well as engaging in meaningful conversations over a good cup of coffee, especially when they involve learning something new or exchanging ideas. I am also an avid reader and enjoy expanding my knowledge through books and

documentaries.

When it comes to relaxation, you are more likely to find me watching a football match or an interesting television documentary than participating in ocean-related activities. For me, these interests provide a refreshing balance to my work and help me stay curious, informed, and engaged.

Do you still get excited every time the submarine dives, or has it become routine now?

After so many years in submarine operations, the actual process of diving has become part of my routine. However, what never becomes routine is the anticipation of what our guests will experience during each dive.

Before descending, we can assess factors such as weather and sea conditions, but we only truly know the underwater conditions—such as currents, visibility, and marine life activity—once we reach the reef. Every dive is different, and there is always an element of uncertainty and discovery.

My greatest hope on every dive is that our passengers have a memorable and satisfying experience. Their reactions and enjoyment are what make each operation meaningful.

In recent years, environmental changes and coastal reclamation projects around the Malé area have had an impact on the local marine ecosystem. As a result, underwater conditions and marine life abundance can vary more than they once did. Despite these challenges, we continue to work hard to provide guests with the best possible underwater experience and to showcase the beauty that still exists beneath the surface.

What role does technology play in maintaining and operating the submarines?

Technology plays a critical role in every aspect of submarine operations, from navigation and communication to safety monitoring, maintenance, and operational efficiency. Modern systems help ensure that dives are conducted safely, reliably, and in accordance with strict operational standards.

As someone who has been involved in the industry for many years, I believe it is important to continuously evaluate and adopt new technologies as they become available. Upgrading submarine systems with modern equipment can improve reliability, reduce maintenance requirements, enhance safety, and increase operational efficiency.

While any modification must be carefully assessed and certified to meet regulatory and safety requirements, investing in newer technologies can often be more cost-effective in the long term.

For specialized operations such as passenger submarines, embracing innovation while maintaining the highest safety standards is essential to ensuring continued success and delivering the best possible experience for our guests.

What advice would you give to young Maldivians interested in careers in tourism, marine operations, or hospitality leadership?

My advice to young Maldivians is to keep an open mind about career opportunities and not limit their ambitions to traditional office-based or "white-collar" jobs. The tourism, marine, and hospitality sectors offer diverse and rewarding career paths that can provide valuable skills, international exposure, and long-term professional growth.

I believe there is sometimes a perception that success is only achieved through certain types of careers. However, industries such as tourism and marine operations are the backbone of the Maldivian economy and offer many opportunities for those willing to learn, work hard, and develop specialized skills.

At the same time, more educational and vocational training opportunities should be created to prepare young people for these industries. Investing in practical training, technical education, and leadership development will help equip the next generation with the skills needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

My message to young Maldivians is simple: be willing to explore opportunities beyond conventional career paths, embrace continuous learning, and take pride in contributing to industries that are vital to our nation's future. Success often comes from dedication, perseverance, and a willingness to gain experience wherever opportunities exist.

Looking ahead, what is your vision for the future of Whale Submarine Maldives and underwater tourism in the country?

My vision for Whale Submarine Maldives is to see the next generation of Maldivians take ownership of its future and continue operating and developing this unique experience for decades to come. Over the years, the submarine has become an iconic part of the Maldives' tourism offering, and I hope to see young professionals equipped with the skills, knowledge, and passion needed to carry this legacy forward.

I believe there is tremendous untapped potential in underwater tourism within the Maldives. Resort owners, investors, and tourism businesses should continue exploring innovative underwater experiences and attractions that go beyond traditional tourism products. By investing in unique marine and underwater-related services, the industry can create new visitor experiences, generate additional revenue streams, and create meaningful employment opportunities for Maldivians.



The Maldives is blessed with extraordinary marine resources, and I believe we should do more to responsibly showcase and utilize these assets. This requires collaboration between the private sector and government institutions. Government support, strategic planning, and investment in marine tourism initiatives, training, and infrastructure can help unlock new opportunities while ensuring the long-term sustainability of our marine environment.

Ultimately, my hope is that the Maldives becomes a global leader in innovative underwater tourism—offering world-class experiences that celebrate our unique marine heritage while creating lasting economic opportunities for future generations.

Manhattan Grand Hotel to Bring Heritage-Inspired Urban Luxury to Hulhumalé



Set to open in the last quarter of 2026, Manhattan Grand Hotel is poised to establish a new benchmark in urban hospitality within the Maldives' rapidly growing capital region. This landmark property will seamlessly blend Maldivian heritage with contemporary luxury, offering a sophisticated experience tailored to business travelers, event organizers, and transit guests.

As one of the largest city hotels in Greater Malé, the 162-room hotel boasts a prime location just 10 minutes from Velana International Airport, providing unmatched convenience and connectivity for guests seeking both short stays and extended visits.

Inspired by the timeless beauty of Hukuru Miskiy, the hotel adopts a "Live the Heritage" concept, integrating traditional craftsmanship and cultural motifs into its architectural design and interior spaces. From intricately crafted accents to locally inspired dining outlets, the property aims to create an immersive environment that celebrates Maldivian culture within a modern cityscape.

A key feature of Manhattan Grand Hotel

is its expansive, purpose-built banquet and event venue. Among the largest in Hulhumalé, the flexible space is designed to accommodate a wide range of functions, including corporate meetings, exhibitions, weddings, and large-scale social events. Supported by state-of-the-art infrastructure and adaptable configurations, it positions the hotel as a premier events destination in the region.

Ali Nahiz, Chief Operating Officer of Manhattan Grand Hotel, commented: "Our vision is to redefine urban hospitality in the Maldives by combining cultural storytelling with modern functionality. We aim to create a destination that not only reflects the rich identity of the Maldives but also caters to the growing demand for high-quality city-based accommodations and versatile event spaces in the Greater Malé area."

With its strategic location, distinctive design, and comprehensive facilities, Manhattan Grand Hotel is set to become a prominent landmark in Hulhumalé, delivering a new standard of city hospitality that celebrates heritage, enhances accessibility, and supports the region's dynamic growth.

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PRO DPV TRAINING WORKSHOP 2026

THE FUTURE OF DIVING IN THE MALDIVES

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INTERVIEW WITH PADI REGIONAL MANAGER - MALDIVES

Why is DPV diving becoming so popular in the Maldives?

The Maldives is one of the best places in the world for drift diving. DPVs make strong currents easier to manage, reduce physical effort, and allow divers to explore more comfortably while using less air. For many divers, it completely transforms the experience.

Are DPVs only suitable for experienced divers?

Not at all. Most recreational divers become comfortable after just one or two dives with proper briefing and supervision. DPVs often increase confidence in current conditions and make diving more relaxed and accessible.

Why are resorts and dive centers investing in DPVs?

DPVs offer guests a premium and innovative experience while creating opportunities for specialty certifications, guided tours, and additional training programs. They help dive centers stand out in a competitive tourism market.

Do you see DPVs as a long-term trend in recreational diving?

Absolutely. We are seeing growing interest from recreational divers worldwide, especially in destinations like the Maldives where currents and large dive sites naturally suit this type of diving. As technology improves, DPVs will become increasingly common in mainstream diving experiences.



Matt Wenger
PADI Regional Manager
- Maldives

+30%

increase in DPV
certifications in the
Maldives in 2025.



PADI continues to support dive centers with world-class training and cutting-edge programs



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Reethi Faru Resort Earns Prestigious Green Globe™ Certification

Reethi Faru Resort is pleased to announce that it has been awarded Green Globe™ certification, affirming its commitment to internationally recognized standards of sustainable tourism excellence.

This achievement reflects the resort's long-standing dedication to responsible luxury hospitality, where environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and operational excellence are seamlessly integrated into every aspect of the guest experience.

Green Globe™ certification is granted following a comprehensive evaluation process based on globally recognized sustainability criteria, verified through independent third-party audits. The standard assesses performance across key areas including environmental management, energy



efficiency, resource conservation, community engagement, and

sustainable operational practices.

By achieving Green Globe™ certification, Reethi Faru Resort joins a select group of hospitality providers worldwide that have demonstrated measurable commitment to continuous improvement and long-term sustainability within the tourism industry.

“This recognition reflects our enduring commitment to preserving the natural beauty of the Maldives while delivering an elevated and meaningful guest experience,” said the management of Reethi Faru Resort. “Sustainability is not an initiative, but a guiding principle embedded in our daily operations.”

The Green Globe™ standard encompasses more than 40 core criteria supported by over 380 compliance indicators, providing a rigorous and evolving framework for sustainable hospitality performance.

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Aviation Forum 2026 Concluded Successfully with Key Discussions

The Aviation Forum 2026 was successfully held on 12th May at Hotel Jen.

The forum has garnered strong endorsements from influential industry bodies, including the Airline Operations Committee (AOC)—a key advocate for aviation operations in the country—as well as the Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI), and Maldives Travel Agents and Tour Operators (MATATO). According to a study conducted by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the Maldivian aviation industry is projected to grow by 154% over the next 20 years, resulting in an estimated 4.7 million additional passenger departures by 2038.

If realized, this growth could contribute approximately USD 8 billion to the national GDP and support around 92,000 jobs. The Aviation Forum is designed to address critical challenges within the aviation industry, focusing on areas such as operations, policy development, safety standards, equipment, and execution involving both public and private entities. It aims to generate actionable solutions and serve as a cornerstone in shaping the future landscape of aviation in the Maldives.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS HELD AT AVIATION FORUM 2026;

1. The New Journey In 3-parts: Capacity, Revenue & Efficiency
2. Reforming Competitive Connectivity
3. Logistics Getaway: Scaling The



Sea-to-air Cargo Transshipment Hub 4. Beyond The Twin-otter

The event is hosted by MEDIUM Events, a comprehensive event management company recognized for organizing industry focused platforms including

the Maldives Marine Expo, Build Expo, Maldives Marine Industry Forum, and the Construction Forum. MEDIUM Events remains dedicated to driving meaningful progress and contributing positively to various Maldivian industries.

MATI Hosts the 4th Edition of the MATI Member Forum



The Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) hosted the 4th Edition of the MATI Member Forum today at H. Meerumaa, Malé.

Held under the theme "Coastal Protection and Island Dynamics", the forum brought together representatives from relevant government ministries, MATI members, industry stakeholders, and experts to discuss key issues related to coastal protection, island dynamics, and innovative approaches to coastal

management in the Maldives. The forum was also graced by the presence of Hon. Minister Ali Shareef, Minister of Climate Change, Environment and Energy, whose attendance underscored the government's commitment to addressing the environmental challenges facing the Maldives.

The event commenced with a recap of previous editions of the MATI Member Forum, along with discussions on unresolved issues and ongoing

challenges affecting the tourism industry raised in previous forums. The Forum featured a series of presentations by industry experts and organisations working in the field of coastal management and sustainable development. Coastal Assembly delivered a presentation titled "Growing Coastlines with Intelligence – How AI is Transforming Beaches into Self-Improving Assets", focusing on the role of artificial intelligence and innovative technologies in enhancing coastal resilience.

This was followed by a presentation by LAMER (Land & Marine Environmental Resource Group Pvt Ltd) titled "Application of Numerical Modelling in Coastal Protection and Island Reclamation", highlighting the scientific modelling and forecasting tools utilised by them in supporting coastal engineering and reclamation projects.

A panel discussion on "**Coastal Protection and Island Dynamics**" followed, moderated by Dr. Ahmed Shaig, Director of CDE Consulting. **The panel included:**

Mr. Mohamed Aslam, Director of LAMER;
Mr. Mohamed Inaz, Director of Climate.
Mr. Asad Ali, Secretary General of MATI

The discussion focused on regulatory challenges, emerging technologies, practical solutions, and the importance of collaboration between the private and public sectors in addressing coastal protection, management, and environmental challenges faced by the Maldives. The session concluded with an open floor discussion, allowing participants to raise additional concerns and share insights on matters affecting the tourism industry. The Forum concluded with a networking lunch, providing an opportunity for further engagement among participants.

INTERVIEW

EVERYONE'S CRAZY FOR DPVs

The underwater scooters transforming diving in the Maldives

Interview with **Miles Crookes**
PADI Course Director & Bluemotion General Manager
— SUEX Distributor, Maldives



©Lorenzo Mittiga

SUEX

In the crystal-clear waters of the Maldives, drift diving has always been one of the greatest attractions for divers from around the world. Strong currents, vibrant reefs and encounters with pelagic marine life make every dive exciting and unpredictable. But those same currents can also be physically demanding, especially for less experienced divers or for anyone wanting to enjoy longer, more relaxed underwater explorations.

That is why DPVs, Diver Propulsion Vehicles, better known as underwater scooters, are rapidly transforming the diving experience across the archipelago. Once considered niche equipment used mainly for technical diving, modern DPVs are now becoming a must-try activity for recreational divers looking for both adventure and comfort underwater. Today, an increasing number of luxury resorts and professional dive centers throughout the Maldives are introducing SUEX DPVs into their diving programs. From exclusive resorts to independent diving operators, underwater scooters are rapidly becoming part of the modern Maldivian diving experience.

A NEW WAY TO RIDE THE CURRENT

The reason for this growing popularity is simple: DPVs completely change the way divers move underwater. With an ergonomic grip and intuitive speed control, divers can glide effortlessly through currents that would otherwise require considerable physical effort. Instead of fighting against the water, they move smoothly and efficiently with it.

The benefits are immediate and noticeable from the very first dive: less fatigue, lower air consumption, longer and more relaxed dives, and the possibility to explore far greater distances.



Miles Crookes

PADI Course Director & Bluemotion General Manager
SUEX Distributor & Maintenance Provider – Maldives

FOR BEGINNERS...AND EXPERTS

One of the most surprising aspects of the DPV trend is that scooters are not reserved only for expert divers. Beginners often benefit the most from the experience. For divers who may initially feel intimidated by Maldivian currents, DPVs provide additional confidence and safety underwater. Reduced physical exertion allows better air management, lower stress levels and a far more enjoyable overall diving experience.

At the same time, experienced divers are rediscovering the ocean in a completely different way. Scooters allow them to cover more ground, explore hidden areas of the reef and experience a sensation of freedom and movement that traditional diving cannot offer. “Most divers become fans after the first try,” says Crookes. “It’s hard to go back.”

POWER, PERFORMANCE, RELIABILITY

Modern SUEX DPVs are engineered for professional and long-term use. Equipped with high-performance lithium batteries, the units can support up to three dives on a single charge while requiring very limited maintenance. Built for reliability in demanding marine environments, these scooters are designed with an operational lifespan exceeding ten years.

“After just one or two dives, most people are confident and ready to go.”

— Miles Crookes

SUPPORT YOU CAN RELY ON

Through Bluemotion, operators across the Maldives can rely on fast and efficient assistance whenever needed. Repairs are handled quickly, and replacement units can be provided if necessary, ensuring minimal downtime and maximum operational reliability for diving businesses.

INTRODUCING DPVs TO YOUR DIVE CENTER

For operators interested in introducing scooters to their guests, the SUEX / PADI / BLUEMOTION DPV Program offers a complete entry point into the world of DPV diving:

- SUEX provides trial DPVs
- PADI delivers certification programs
- Bluemotion supports centers through training and instructor development.

The initiative allows resorts and dive centers to test the equipment and integrate the technology smoothly into their diving operations.

MORE THAN A TREND

More than simply a passing trend, DPVs represent a real evolution in the way divers experience the underwater world. By making strong-current diving more accessible and adding an entirely new sense of freedom underwater, scooters are redefining what is possible beneath the surface.

In a destination as dynamic and adventure-driven as the Maldives, that evolution feels perfectly at home.

WHERE TO TRY IT

An increasing number of dive centers and luxury resorts now offer SUEX DPVs, including:

- Four Seasons Resort Maldives
- Cheval Blanc Randheli
- Velaa Private Island
- Constance Moofushi
- Nakai Resorts
- iDIVE
- Werner Lau Diving Centers
- Dive Club Maldives
- Aquaventure Maldives
- Maldives Blue Force

From high-end resorts to independent dive centers, DPVs are spreading fast across the archipelago.



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CGM Participates in the WorldChefs Congress 2026



A 12-chef delegation from the Maldives participated in the WorldChefs Congress 2026, held from 16th to 19th May 2026 in Newport, Wales. The WorldChefs Congress is the world's largest international gathering of professional chefs, bringing together culinary leaders

from across the globe.

The WorldChefs Congress is a biennial international event that brings together chefs to exchange knowledge, share innovations, and strengthen professional networks within the global culinary

industry. The three-day congress featured keynote addresses by Michelin-starred chefs, hands-on skill development and co-learning workshops, and discussions on contemporary issues shaping the culinary world, including sustainability, food security, and evolving gastronomic trends.

In addition, the highly anticipated Global Chefs Challenge Finals took place on the sidelines of the Congress. This is a cooking competition where the world's top chefs compete in four competition categories. The finalists were determined through Regional Semi-Finals in 2025.

Through participation in international platforms such as the WorldChefs Congress, the Chefs Guild of Maldives continues to advance its commitment to professional development, culinary excellence, and international collaboration, while also exploring opportunities to bring global best practices into the Maldives' gastronomy

scene.

WorldChefs Congress was last held in 2024 in Singapore, where a 30-member delegation of the Chefs Guild of Maldives participated.

The next edition of the WorldChefs Congress & Expo will be held in Paris, France in 2028, marking the 100th anniversary of the World Association of Chefs' Societies (WorldChefs), which was founded in Paris in 1928.

The Chefs Guild of Maldives hopes to expand opportunities for Maldivian Young Chefs to participate in this historic congress, recognizing the important role young culinary professionals play in shaping the future of the industry. Through greater international exposure, networking, and professional development opportunities, the Chefs Guild of Maldives aims to continue empowering and inspiring the next generation of Maldivian chefs.

Global Innovation & Leadership Summit in Colombo Strengthens Sri Lanka–India Ties

The Global Innovation & Leadership Summit, organized by Zee Media and WION International Media Network, was held last week at the Cinnamon Grand Colombo, bringing together distinguished leaders, policymakers, and business visionaries from Sri Lanka and India. The summit celebrated the achievements of selected Indian business leaders, recognizing their contributions to innovation and entrepreneurship while reinforcing the importance of cross-border collaboration.

The event was graced by Mr. Hanif Yusof, Governor of the Western Province, Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe Deputy Minister of Tourism, Mr. Chathuranga Abeyasinghe, Deputy Minister of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development, H.E. Santhosh Jha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, Mr. Sudhir Chaudhary, CEO of Zee Media, and many other distinguished guests and diplomats.

Addressing the summit under the theme "The Island Where India Feels at Home", Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe made a candid admission about the untapped potential of the Indian outbound travel market. He

noted that while 32.7 million Indians traveled abroad in 2025, over 531,000 visited Sri Lanka. "I feel something is wrong here, and I think there is something to be fixed, which will be our focus in the years to come," he said, pointing to Sri Lanka's geographic advantages as a natural starting point. He emphasized that Indian travelers remain a pillar of sustainability for Sri Lanka's tourism industry, providing resilience and consistency throughout the year.

Outlining his vision for deeper bilateral ties, Prof. Ranasinghe stressed that India and Sri Lanka together can emerge as a unified economic zone, helping drive the growth and future of the Global South. He identified agriculture, marine industries, and the creative sector as three areas with significant growth potential in the coming years. Highlighting Sri Lanka's unique tourism proposition, he explained that unlike many destinations where travelers must choose between experiences, Sri Lanka offers the opportunity to combine multiple experiences—heritage, nature, wellness, and adventure—within a single journey.



He also noted that India remains the top outbound destination for Sri Lankans, particularly for Buddhist pilgrimages, underscoring the deep cultural ties binding the two nations.

Acknowledging the rapidly shifting landscape of global travel, Prof. Ranasinghe observed that "global travel is evolving, and AI is adapting to these changing trends and consumer preferences. We are witnessing a shift from short-term visits to longer stays, with digital nomads choosing to spend several months here." He expressed confidence in Sri Lanka's tourism

outlook, while recognizing the challenges of competing with established destinations such as Thailand and Bali.

Echoing similar sentiments, Deputy Minister Chathuranga Abeyasinghe emphasized the importance of closer regional integration. He highlighted agriculture, marine, and creative industries as key sectors likely to drive growth in the coming years, and underscored that India and Sri Lanka together can function as "one economic zone" with the potential to power the future of the Global South.

Dhiraagu and Allied Announces Free Home Contents Takaful



Dhiraagu has partnered with Allied Insurance Company of the Maldives to launch a new promotion combining home internet services with added protection benefits. The partnership, announced during a press conference at Dhiraagu Head Office, introduces Home Contents Takaful, an Islamic insurance solution, for customers subscribing to Dhiraagu Limitehneh Fibre plans. During the event, Allied was also recognised as a Dhiraagu Elite Club Partner.

Through this promotion, both new and existing customers subscribed to any Dhiraagu Limitehneh Fibre package will receive complimentary Home Contents Takaful coverage worth up to MVR 150,000 per household. The initiative aims to provide customers with greater security and peace of mind alongside reliable fibre connectivity.

Customers signing up for new Dhiraagu Limitehneh Fibre plans starting from 30M and above will additionally receive a free SmartView Indoor Camera from Dhiraagu. Those opting for 50M packages and above will benefit further with 12 months of complimentary cloud storage, enhancing the camera's security and monitoring features.

Speaking at the launch, Dhiraagu Assistant Manager for PR and Sponsorships, Nashaya Naeem, said

the company continues to explore innovative partnerships and value-added services to enrich customers' digital lifestyles. She explained that the collaboration with Allied transforms home fibre services into a more comprehensive digital living experience by combining high-speed connectivity with built-in household protection.

Representing Allied, Manager of Allied Takaful, Fathimath Nizma, highlighted the importance of making protection solutions more accessible to households nationwide. She said the partnership merges Allied's expertise in insurance protection with Dhiraagu's nationwide fibre network, creating a service that goes beyond convenience to deliver practical and lasting value to communities across the Maldives.

The Home Contents Takaful plan covers household belongings, fixtures, fittings, and interior items against risks such as fire, theft, storms, floods, and other covered damages. Meanwhile, the SmartView Indoor Camera offers features including 1080p Full HD video, night vision, 360-degree coverage, AI motion detection with instant alerts, and two-way audio. The promotion will run until 19 August 2026, with applications available through Dhiraagu MyAccount, while Dhiraagu Elite Club members can also access discounts of up to 10 percent on selected Allied Takaful products.

MARINE MASTER BOATYARD

DOCKING SERVICE UPTO 220 TONS

SCAN ME

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Ooredoo Maldives: First in Maldives to Introduce eSIM Services to Both Apple and Samsung

Ooredoo is the first telecommunications provider in the Maldives to offer eSIM services for both Apple Watch and Samsung Galaxy Watch devices.

With this service, customers can stay connected directly from their smartwatches without needing to keep their smartphone nearby. The service enables users to make and receive calls, send messages, stream music, receive notifications, and access apps seamlessly through their wearable devices.

As the leading digital innovator in the Maldives, Ooredoo continues to bring world-class technologies and connected experiences to customers across the country. The introduction of wearable eSIM services marks another important step in Ooredoo's commitment to building a smarter and more connected

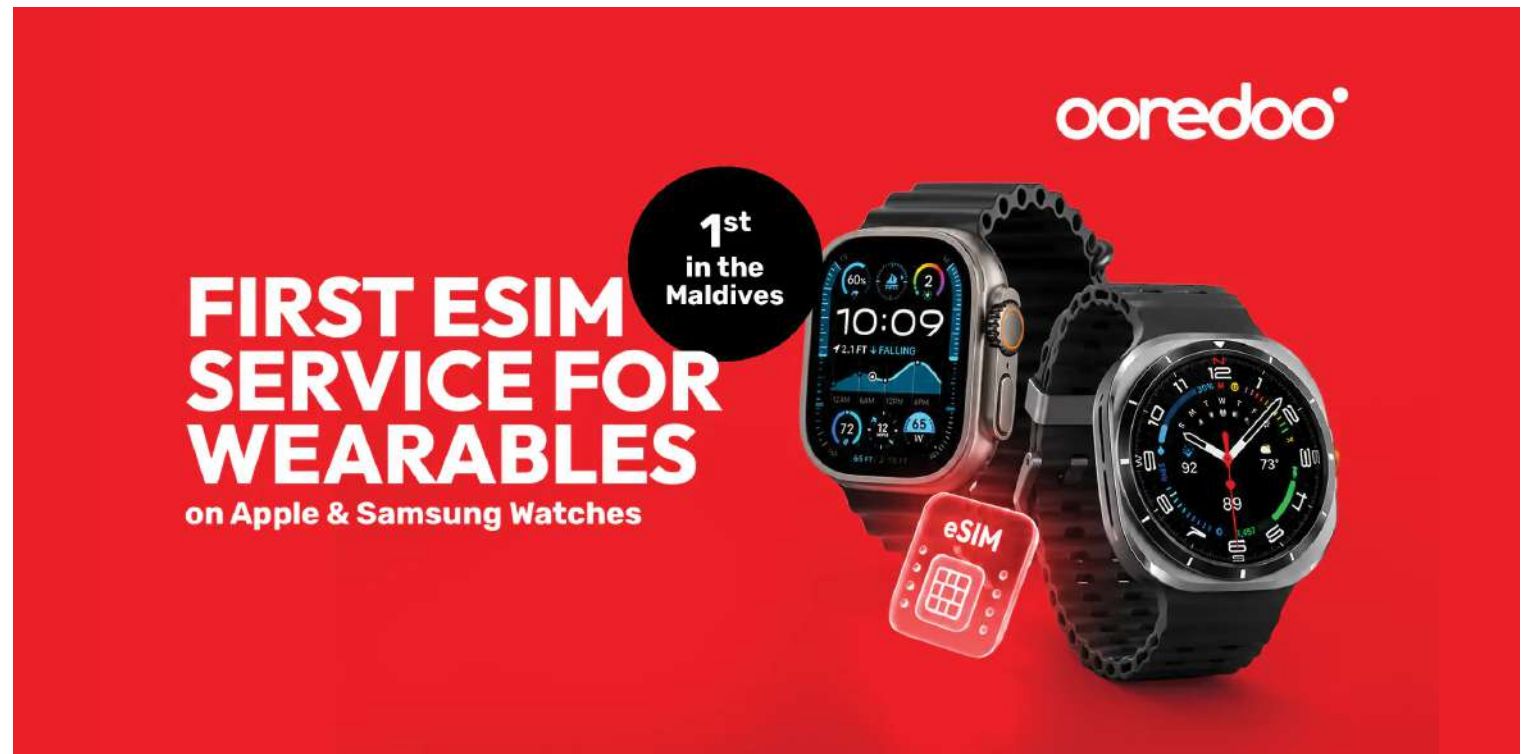
Digital Maldives.

The service supports compatible Apple Watch and Samsung Galaxy Watch models, allowing customers greater flexibility and convenience in their daily

lives – whether during workouts, travel, outdoor activities, or on the go

Ooredoo Maldives has consistently led the telecommunications industry in the country through groundbreaking

innovations, including being the first to introduce 3G, 4G, and 5G services in the Maldives. The addition of wearable eSIM services further strengthens Ooredoo's position as the pacemaker of digital innovation in the nation.



Australia Donates Drones to Enhance Maritime Safety Paving the Way for More Tourist's Arrivals



Australia has donated twelve surveillance drones to the Sri Lanka Coast Guard in a move aimed at strengthening maritime safety and security. The initiative is expected to support safer coastal environments while contributing to the growth and confidence of Sri Lanka's

tourism industry.

The official handover ceremony took place at the Sri Lanka Coast Guard Headquarters in Mirissa last week. The event was attended by senior representatives from both countries, including Rear Admiral

Brett Sonter, Commander of the Australian Joint Agency Task Force for Operation Sovereign Borders, and Rear Admiral Rohan Joseph, Director General of the Sri Lanka Coast Guard.

Australian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Matthew Duckworth and First Secretary Inspector Paul Edwards were also present at the ceremony, reflecting the importance of the partnership between the two nations. The visiting delegation was formally welcomed by Rear Admiral Joseph, highlighting the strong and cooperative ties shared by Australia and Sri Lanka.

Speaking at the event, Rear Admiral Joseph said the new surveillance capabilities would help create safer waters and strengthen maritime monitoring efforts. He noted that improved coastal security would enhance Sri Lanka's appeal as a destination for tourists seeking activities such as water sports, fishing, and marine adventures while supporting eco-friendly tourism and

environmental protection.

Matthew Duckworth described the initiative as a reflection of the mutual respect and cooperation between Australia and Sri Lanka. He said the collaboration not only supports maritime security but also creates opportunities for future partnerships that can contribute to tourism development and ensure Sri Lanka remains a safe and welcoming destination for travellers.

Inspector Paul Edwards emphasised the wider potential of the partnership, highlighting opportunities for collaboration between Australian travel agencies and Sri Lankan hospitality providers to create more tailored travel experiences. Echoing this sentiment, Sri Lanka Coast Guard's Deputy Director General said the partnership would play an important role in safeguarding the country's waters and enhancing the overall tourism experience, reinforcing a shared commitment to ensuring safe and inviting maritime environments for visitors.

Thailand Reduces Visa Exemption Stay to 30 Days - Maldives Restricted to 15 Days Under New Regulations



Thailand’s revamp of its visa-exemption policies is transforming regional travel, with the Maldives being one of the most impacted nations. With the new “one country, one privilege” model, the majority of nationalities will now benefit from 30 days of visa-free entry; however, the Maldives has been categorized under a 15-day exemption, the shortest option available.

The adjustment comes after Thailand scrapped its earlier 60-day visa-free program, which had encouraged long-term tourism and drawn visitors in search of extended vacations or remote work opportunities. Thailand is enhancing entry requirements under the new regulations to tackle

overstays, unauthorized employment, and safety issues, while emphasizing “quality tourists.”

Maldivian tourists, particularly those traveling to Thailand for medical treatment, shopping, or brief leisure journeys, will now encounter tighter restrictions. A 15-day visit might need extra planning or more visa applications, raising travel expenses and limiting flexibility.

Visitors currently in Thailand under the previous regulations can stay until their authorized duration ends. Once the new system is implemented, Maldivians must adhere to the revised 15-day exemption or apply via Thailand’s e-Visa platform.

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Date, Pistachio, & Orange Blossom Symphony



Chef Madduma Totage Dushmantha Prageeth – Head Pastry Chef

With more than 25 years of passion, discipline, and culinary artistry, Chef Prageeth stands as a true master of pastry at Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa. His journey began as a kitchen artist driven by curiosity and creativity, evolving into an extraordinary career shaped by dedication, precision, and an unwavering pursuit of excellence.

Having honed his craft across more than 15 luxury hotels worldwide, including renowned destinations in Australia and Germany, Chef Prageeth has spent over 15 years in executive pastry leadership, continuously redefining what dessert artistry can be. Now at his seventh property in the Maldives, he brings a refined global perspective infused with meticulous technique and bold imagination.

His exceptional talent has earned international recognition, most notably at the World Cup of Culinary Arts (Pastry Art) 2022 in Luxembourg, where he proudly secured gold, silver, and bronze medals—a testament to his skill, vision, and relentless commitment to his craft. For Chef Prageeth, pastry is more than a discipline, it's a lifelong expression of art, excellence, and inspiration on every plate.

YIELD 1 round cake (18-20 cm) Serves 10-12 refined portions

PISTACHIO SPONGE BASE (JOCONDE STYLE)

INGREDIENTS:

- 80 g ground pistachio
- 80 g icing sugar
- 2 whole eggs
- 2 egg whites
- 40 g caster sugar
- 40 g cake flour
- 30 g unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 3 ml vanilla extract
- A pinch of salt

METHOD:

- Whisk the ground pistachio, icing sugar, and whole eggs together until the mixture becomes light and reaches ribbon stage.
- In a separate bowl, whip the egg whites with caster sugar to soft peaks, then gently fold into the pistachio mixture.
- Sift in the flour and salt, folding carefully to maintain aeration. Incorporate the melted butter and vanilla extract until just combined. Spread the batter evenly onto a lined baking tray to a thickness of approximately 8-10 mm.
- Bake at 170°C for 10-12 minutes until lightly golden. Allow to cool completely before cutting a disc to fit the cake ring.

DATE & SPICE INSERT (SOFT GEL LAYER)

INGREDIENTS:

- 180 g dates, pitted and chopped
- 120 ml fresh orange juice
- 40 g brown sugar
- 2 g cinnamon powder
- 1 g cardamom powder
- 0.5 g nutmeg
- 4 g gelatin sheets (or powder equivalent)
- 40 g chopped pistachios

METHOD:

- Simmer the chopped dates with orange juice, brown sugar, and spices for 5-6 minutes until softened and aromatic.
- Blend the mixture into a coarse purée, retaining some texture.
- Add the bloomed gelatin while the mixture is still warm, stirring until fully dissolved. Fold in the chopped pistachios.
- Pour the mixture into a smaller ring (14-16 cm) and freeze until set.

What Inspired the Chef to Create the Dish

Rooted in the spirit of Ramadan, this dessert draws inspiration from moments of reflection, generosity, and shared Iftar traditions. Chef Prageeth reimagines classic Ramadan flavors—nourishing dates and warming spices like cardamom and cinnamon—layered with pistachio to honor tradition while presenting it through a refined, contemporary pastry expression.

At Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa, the creation reflects the brand's ethos of connection and togetherness. Designed to be shared, it balances elegance and comfort, inviting guests to slow down, savor the moment, and celebrate the holy month through meaningful, thoughtfully crafted flavors.



Courtesy of
Madduma Totage Dushmantha Prageeth – Head Pastry Chef
Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa

SPICED PISTACHIO MOUSSE

INGREDIENTS:

- 120 ml milk
- 3 egg yolks
- 60 g caster sugar
- 120 g pistachio paste
- 8 g gelatin sheets
- 1 g ground cinnamon
- 0.5 g cardamom powder
- 300 ml whipping cream (35%), semi-whipped

METHOD:

- Heat the milk with cinnamon and cardamom. Whisk the egg yolks with caster sugar and temper with the hot milk. Cook gently to 82-84°C to form a smooth crème anglaise.
- Remove from heat and add the gelatin, followed by the pistachio paste, emulsifying until smooth. Allow the mixture to cool to 30-32°C before gently folding in the semi-whipped cream to achieve a light and airy mousse.

ASSEMBLY

- Line a cake ring with acetate. Place the pistachio sponge at the base and pour half of the pistachio mousse over it. Insert the frozen date layer at the center and cover with the remaining mousse.
- Level the surface and freeze for a minimum of six hours or overnight to ensure proper setting.

OPTIONAL GLAZE / FINISH

Neutral Pistachio Mirror Glaze:

- 300 g neutral glaze
- 40 g pistachio paste
- Green food coloring (optional)

Warm the glaze to 32-34°C and glaze the frozen cake for a smooth, elegant finish.

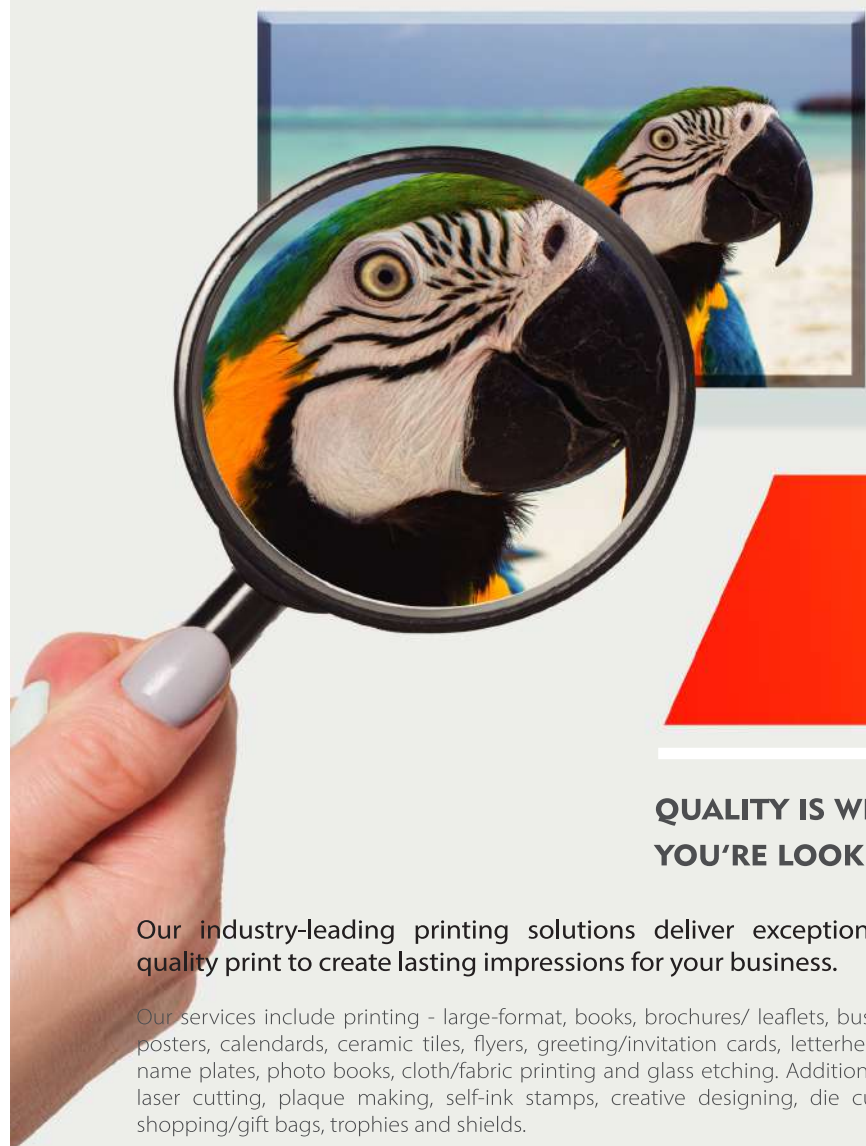
TO SERVE

- Finish with refined garnishes such as gold-dusted pistachios, date gel pearls, white chocolate décor, or bronze leaf accents for a luxury buffet presentation.
- Serve with orange blossom syrup, cardamom espuma, or date caramel for a perfectly balanced dessert experience.



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How can dive centres, liveaboard operators, and boating businesses maximize the benefits of participating in international dive shows, and what key opportunities can these events create for business growth and destination promotion?



Hussain Sendi Rasheed
Vice President
Indian Ocean Divers Association, IODA

“ Stay current with developments in dive equipment – Explore the latest innovations in scuba, freediving, technical diving, underwater photography, and safety equipment.

Educational updates – Attend seminars, workshops, and presentations on new diving techniques, safety procedures, environmental issues, and industry best practices.

Environmental awareness – Gain insights into marine conservation initiatives, coral reef protection, citizen science programs, and sustainable diving practices.

Access to new technologies – Experience hands-on demonstrations of the latest dive computers, rebreathers, underwater communication systems, and photography equipment.

Learn about emerging trends, new destinations, customer preferences, and developments within the global diving industry.

Establish partnerships, promote services, attract potential clients, and identify new business opportunities.



Zoona Naseem,
Owner and Co-founder
Moodhu Bulhaa

“ Small businesses often find it difficult to participate in tourism and trade shows due to the associated costs. A more effective approach would be for the island community to work together to promote the island as a destination. By marketing the island collectively, local businesses - especially dive centres - gain exposure and opportunities through the destination itself. This shared approach reduces costs, strengthens the island’s brand, and benefits the entire community.



Anees Adenwala,
Partner
Orca Dive Club

“ Having attended international dive shows for over two decades as both a dive instructor and dive centre owner, I have found that their greatest value lies in the relationships they help build. While generating bookings is important, these events provide a unique opportunity to meet divers face-to-face, connect with industry partners, and develop collaborations that often lead to long-term business growth.

In my experience, many of our strongest partnerships, repeat guests, and successful group expeditions have started with a simple conversation at an international dive show. That is why I believe the real return on investment comes not just from sales during the event, but from the relationships and opportunities that continue long after the show has ended.



Sham Mohamed
Director
Medium Events

“ International dive shows offer a valuable platform for marine tourism businesses, but success comes from having a clear strategy. Rather than simply exhibiting, participants should prepare in advance with scheduled meetings, special offers, and targeted marketing activities.

Beyond selling individual dive trips, these events help secure group bookings and charters, attract visitors during off-peak periods, and build relationships with international dive operators and media. When operators participate together under a national pavilion, they can collectively promote their destination and highlight unique attractions such as marine life encounters, dive sites, and underwater experiences.

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