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“ Charting New Horizons for Maldivian Travel *An Exclusive Conversation with Mohamed Firaq* ”

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Watch Video

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

As a new year dawns, it brings with it renewed aspirations and the promise of fresh beginnings. A new chapter has unfolded for our nation's leading industry. For eight consecutive years, we have remained committed to delivering consistent news and information related to the tourism sector. Through these efforts, we believe the breathtaking beaches of the Maldives, our crystal-clear lagoons, and the vibrant underwater gardens of our reefs have been showcased to the global stage with remarkable impact.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the resorts for their unwavering support and cooperation throughout this journey. This year is filled with promise one we anticipate will see the Maldivian tourism industry continue to flourish and achieve meaningful, fruitful results.

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year*

2026

How the Maldives Is Shaping the Future of Island Tourism

by Ali Rilwan



For decades, the Maldives has been synonymous with turquoise lagoons, overwater villas, and world-class luxury. Yet as global travel evolves, the island nation is moving beyond its iconic image to actively shape the future of island tourism. By blending sustainability, innovation, cultural authenticity, and inclusive growth, the Maldives is positioning itself not just as a destination, but as a global model for responsible and resilient tourism.

At the heart of this transformation is a strong commitment to sustainable and regenerative tourism. With fragile coral reefs and marine ecosystems forming the foundation of its appeal, the Maldives understands that protecting nature is essential to protecting tourism itself. Resorts and local islands are increasingly investing in coral restoration projects, marine research, turtle conservation, and reef-safe tourism practices. The shift from traditional luxury to eco-luxury is clear, as renewable energy, waste reduction, and plastic-free initiatives become standard across the industry.

Equally significant is the diversification of tourism beyond the traditional

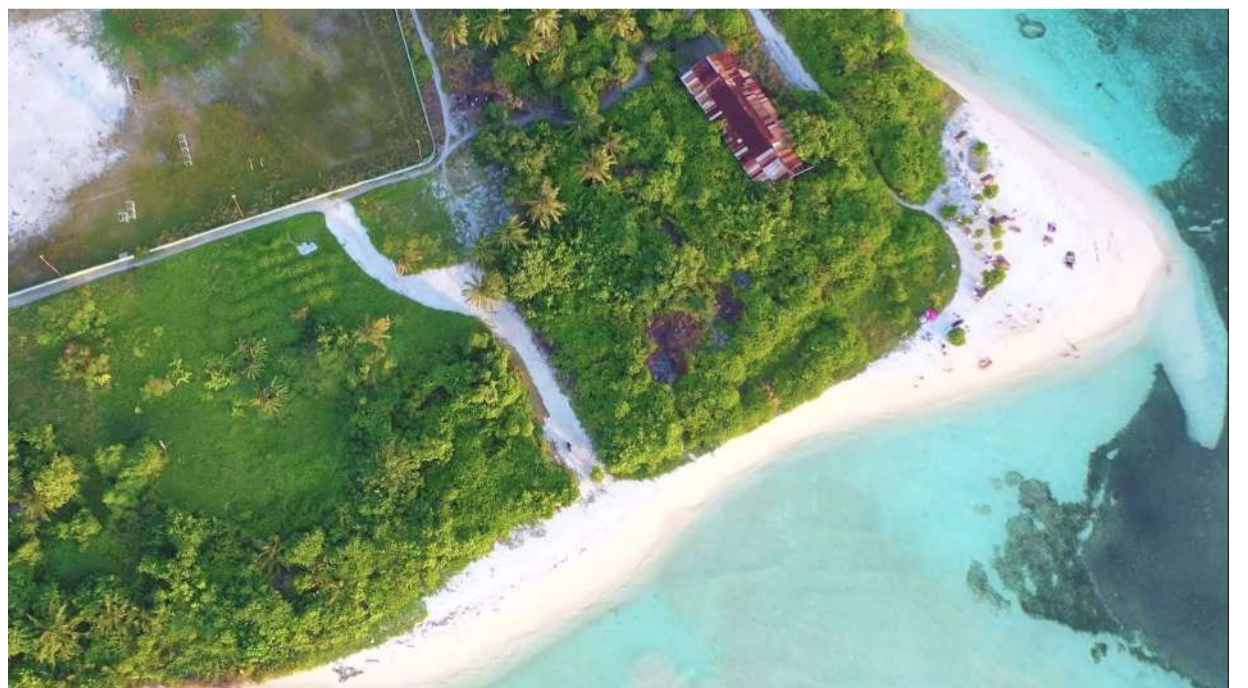
one-island-one-resort model. Local island tourism has grown rapidly, offering travelers affordable, authentic experiences rooted in Maldivian daily life. Guesthouses, community-run excursions, cultural events, and local cuisine now form an important part of the tourism landscape. This evolution allows visitors to connect with the people, traditions, and rhythms of island life while ensuring tourism benefits reach local communities more directly.

The Maldives is also embracing technology to redefine the guest

experience. Smart resort systems, AI-assisted services, contactless travel solutions, and data-driven marketing are enhancing efficiency and personalization. High-speed digital connectivity has opened doors for long-stay travelers and remote workers, introducing new segments such as digital nomads and extended-stay visitors. These innovations are helping the Maldives remain competitive in a rapidly changing global tourism market.

Infrastructure development continues to support this forward momentum. Airport expansion, improved inter-island connectivity, and modernized transport networks are making even remote atolls more accessible. Investments in domestic airports and seaplane services are spreading tourism across the country, reducing pressure on central regions while unlocking opportunities in the outer islands.

Climate change remains one of the Maldives' greatest challenges, but it has also driven innovation. Coastal protection projects, sustainable construction methods, and adaptive island planning are shaping a future





where tourism and environmental resilience go hand in hand. Rather than viewing vulnerability as a weakness, the Maldives is turning it into a platform for global leadership in climate-aware tourism.

People remain central to this vision. Greater emphasis is being placed on training, education, and leadership development for Maldivians within the tourism sector. By empowering local talent and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, the industry is becoming more inclusive and socially sustainable.

Ultimately, the Maldives is redefining what island tourism can be. It is no longer only about escape and indulgence, but about balance—between luxury and responsibility, growth and preservation, global appeal and local identity. As the world looks toward more meaningful and sustainable travel, the Maldives stands at the forefront, shaping the future of island tourism with purpose, innovation, and vision.



- 175 Resorts
- 16 Hotels
- 158 Liverboards
- 846 Guest Houses

Explore Maldives



KAAFU DHIFFUSHI

The Sunrise Island of Authentic Maldivian Charm

by Azim

K. Dhiffushi is a small yet captivating local island in the Maldives' Kaafu Atoll, celebrated for its serene atmosphere, warm community spirit, and breathtaking natural beauty. Located approximately 37 kilometres northeast of Malé, the island is easily accessible by speedboat, making it an ideal short escape for travelers seeking an authentic Maldivian experience without venturing far from the capital. Fondly known as "The Sunrise Island," Dhiffushi is among the first places in the Maldives to greet the morning sun, offering magical early-morning views that set the tone for a peaceful island stay.

Measuring roughly 950 metres in length and 200 metres in width, Dhiffushi is compact and walkable, with everything conveniently close at hand. The island's small size contributes to its relaxed, low-key vibe, allowing visitors to slow down and truly connect with their surroundings. Clean streets, colourful houses, community gardens, and smiling locals create an inviting atmosphere where traditional island life blends naturally with a growing tourism scene.

Dhiffushi's beaches are one of its greatest highlights. Soft white sands and clear turquoise lagoons surround the island, providing ideal conditions for





swimming, sunbathing, and unwinding by the sea. Designated bikini beaches ensure comfort for international visitors, while quieter stretches of shoreline offer tranquil spots to enjoy the ocean breeze and uninterrupted views of the horizon.

For adventure seekers, Dhiffushi offers an impressive range of water-based activities. The island's house reef is excellent for snorkeling and diving, with vibrant corals and diverse marine life just a short swim from shore. Visitors frequently spot turtles, reef sharks, and stingrays, adding to the island's appeal. Jet-skiing, kayaking, paddleboarding, and sandbank excursions are also popular, while some areas are known for nightly stingray feeding, creating a memorable and unique experience.



Beyond its natural attractions, Dhiffushi shines in its cultural authenticity. Visitors are encouraged to engage with local life—sampling traditional Maldivian cuisine, learning about island customs, and interacting with residents who are known for their hospitality. The island features a growing selection of budget-friendly guesthouses, beachside restaurants, and cafés, including popular spots like Kettle, alongside small shops catering to everyday needs.



Electric buggies and scooters provide easy transport around the island, though most places are just a short walk away. Increasingly, Dhiffushi is also embracing eco-friendly practices, with community-led cleanliness initiatives and a focus on sustainable tourism.



Natural Attractions

BAA ATOLL BIOSPHERE RESERVE

BAA ATOLL LOCATED IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF THE ATOLL CHAIN THAT FORM THE MALDIVES IS CONSIDERED GLOBALLY SIGNIFICANT IN TERMS OF ITS BIODIVERSITY. THE ATOLL COVERS AN AREA OF OVER 139,000 HECTARES...

ADDU NATURE PARK

Addu Atoll is the southernmost atoll in the Maldives atoll chain. There are altogether five inhabited islands, which form six administrative districts, in the atoll. The islands on the western flank...



Turtles and the Maldives: A Vital Link Between Marine Conservation and Tourism

by Ummeedh



Sea turtles hold a special place in the Maldives, not only as an essential part of the nation's marine ecosystem but also as a powerful symbol of sustainable tourism. The Maldives is home to five species of sea turtles, most commonly the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and the Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), both of which are frequently seen in lagoons, reefs, and seagrass beds across the archipelago. Their presence plays a crucial role in maintaining healthy coral reef systems—an ecosystem that lies at the very heart of Maldivian tourism.

From an ecological perspective, turtles are natural caretakers of the ocean. Green turtles help maintain healthy seagrass meadows by grazing, which supports fish populations and stabilizes seabed's. Hawksbill turtles feed on sponges that would otherwise overgrow and suffocate coral reefs. These balanced marine environments are exactly what

visitors come to experience when they imagine the Maldives: clear waters, vibrant reefs, and abundant marine life.

Tourism and turtles are deeply interconnected in the Maldives. For many travelers, the chance to encounter sea turtles in their natural habitat is a highlight of their visit. Snorkeling alongside a turtle gliding effortlessly through the water or spotting one during a dive creates a powerful emotional connection to the ocean. Visitors often describe these experiences as unforgettable, and they significantly enhance the Maldives' appeal as a world-class marine destination.

Yes—tourists actively come to the Maldives hoping to see turtles. Many resorts and local islands promote turtle sightings as part of their snorkeling and diving experiences, with known turtle cleaning stations and feeding grounds becoming popular excursion sites. Guided turtle snorkeling trips, reef explorations, and even educational





marine talks are increasingly common, reflecting growing visitors' interest in wildlife-focused travel. For eco-conscious travelers, destinations where turtles are protected and respected are especially attractive.

The economic importance of turtles to Maldivian tourism is substantial. Healthy turtle populations contribute to the overall quality of the reef ecosystem, which directly supports diving, snorkeling, and nature-based tourism. In turn, this creates jobs for dive instructors, boat operators, guides, guesthouse owners, and resort staff, while strengthening the Maldives' reputation as a sustainable tourism leader.

However, this relationship also comes with responsibility. Turtles face threats from climate change, coral bleaching, plastic pollution, boat strikes, and irresponsible tourism practices.



Recognizing this, the Maldives has implemented legal protections for sea turtles, banning their capture and trade, while many resorts, NGOs, and local communities actively participate in conservation initiatives. These include turtle rescue and rehabilitation centres, reef-safe tourism guidelines, nesting site protection, and awareness programs for both visitors and locals.

Turtles are more than a marine attraction in the Maldives—they are ambassadors of ocean health. Their survival is closely tied to the future of Maldivian tourism. By protecting turtles, the Maldives safeguards its reefs, preserves its natural beauty, and ensures that future generations of travelers can continue to experience the magic of swimming alongside one of the ocean's most ancient and graceful creatures.

Cultural Hotspots



Utheemu Ganduvaru (Haa Alif Utheemu)



Muleeaage, The official residence of the President



Hukuru Miskiy & Munnaaru (Malé City)



Kuruhinna Tharaagandu (Kaafu Kaashidhoo)



Old Mosque (Laamu Isdhoo)

Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi: A Realm of Unrivalled Luxury

by Azim



Set across three private islands in the South Malé Atoll, Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi stands as one of the most exclusive and expansive luxury resorts in the Maldives. Just a 40-minute luxury yacht journey from Velana International Airport, the resort offers a seamless transition from arrival to absolute seclusion, where contemporary design, natural beauty, and personalized service converge in extraordinary harmony.

Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi features 119 villas, each designed to provide the utmost privacy while celebrating the surrounding ocean and lush tropical landscape. From overwater villas suspended above crystal-clear lagoons to beachfront residences embraced by soft white sands, every accommodation boasts a private infinity pool, expansive living spaces, and refined interiors inspired by Maldivian craftsmanship. For those seeking the pinnacle of exclusivity, the Private Island offers a self-contained sanctuary with two villas, a private spa, chef, and dedicated concierge, redefining bespoke luxury.

Dining at the resort is a destination, with an impressive collection of 11 restaurants and bars curated by world-class chefs. Guests can embark on a global culinary journey, from modern Japanese flavours at Zuma Maldives to elevated Chinese cuisine at Li Long, and Mediterranean-inspired dishes at Terra, where bamboo-pod dining creates an intimate treetop experience. Each venue is thoughtfully designed to complement its cuisine, offering both visual theatre and exceptional taste.



Wellness and recreation are integral to the Waldorf Astoria experience. The Waldorf Astoria Spa is a sanctuary of holistic rejuvenation, offering tailored treatments across private spa villas set above tranquil waters. Fitness enthusiasts can enjoy state-of-the-art

facilities, tennis courts, and personalized training sessions, while the resort's pristine reefs invite guests to explore vibrant marine life through snorkeling and diving. Families are equally catered for, with a dedicated kids' club and engaging activities designed for younger guests.



Beyond its exceptional amenities, Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi is defined by its commitment to personalized service. Every detail is meticulously curated, ensuring each stay reflects the individual preferences of its guests. Whether indulging in a sunset cruise, a private beachside dinner, or a bespoke wellness journey, experiences are crafted to create lasting memories.



With its grand scale, architectural elegance, and unwavering attention to detail, Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi is more than a resort—it is a destination that embodies the very essence of Maldivian luxury, setting a benchmark for refined island living in the Indian Ocean.

Why Young People Should Choose Tourism: Investing in the Future of the Nation

by Rilwan



Tourism is more than an industry—it is the backbone of the Maldivian economy and a powerful driver of national development. For young people, entering the tourism sector is not only a pathway to personal growth and career success, but also a meaningful way to contribute to the country's long-term prosperity. As the Maldives continues to shape the future of global island tourism, youth involvement has never been more important.

One of the greatest strengths of tourism is the wide range of opportunities it offers. From hospitality management, marketing, and finance to marine biology, culinary arts, engineering, wellness, and digital technology, tourism is a diverse ecosystem that goes far beyond hotel operations. Young Maldivians can build careers as resort managers, dive instructors, chefs, sustainability officers, content creators, event planners, and entrepreneurs—often with opportunities for international exposure and professional advancement.

Tourism also plays a vital role in job creation. As the country's largest employer, the sector provides stable livelihoods for thousands of families across multiple atolls. When young people choose tourism careers, it reduces unemployment, strengthens household incomes, and supports balanced regional development. Importantly, it allows talent from outer islands to thrive without relocating permanently to the capital, helping to ease urban pressure and preserve island communities.



Beyond employment, tourism equips young people with valuable life skills. Communication, leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, and cultural awareness are developed naturally

From a national perspective, youth participation strengthens the sustainability of tourism. Young people bring innovation, digital literacy, and fresh ideas that are essential for modern travel trends. Whether in eco-tourism, smart hospitality, or community-based experiences, youth-led initiatives help the Maldives remain competitive while protecting its natural and cultural heritage.

Tourism also nurtures pride in national identity. By working in the industry, young Maldivians become ambassadors of their country—sharing stories, traditions, and values with the world. This cultural exchange strengthens global understanding while reinforcing the importance of preserving local customs, marine life, and island environments.

Critically, tourism empowers entrepreneurship. Guesthouses, excursion services, cafés, creative studios, transport services, and eco-projects offer young people the chance to start and scale businesses. These small and medium enterprises not only generate income but also keep tourism benefits within local communities.

Ultimately, when young people choose tourism, the entire nation benefits. A skilled, motivated youth workforce ensures service excellence, economic resilience, and sustainable growth. As the Maldives continues to evolve as a global tourism leader, investing in youth participation is an investment in the country's future—one that strengthens the economy, protects the environment, and secures prosperity for generations to come.

When Night Falls: How Noctourism Could Re-Define Maldivian Travel

by Bassam

“The Maldives may be world famous for sunsets, but the real magic begins after dark.”

Introduction:

Beyond Sunsets and Sandbanks

For decades, the Maldivian tourism story has been told in daylight. From dawn snorkeling sessions to sunset cruises, the archipelago's tourism rhythm has been tied to the sun. But globally, a new trend is rising “noctourism”, a movement that celebrates the beauty, mystery, and experience of destinations at night.

As travelers seek deeper, more memorable, and Instagram-worthy experiences, the Maldives' pristine night skies, bioluminescent waters, and unique marine behavior after sunset present an untapped opportunity to redefine the destination's allure.

The Global Rise of Noctourism

Around the world, nighttime experiences are becoming core tourism products — not afterthoughts. In destinations like Iceland, Finland, and Canada, aurora tourism fills entire calendars. Japan and Thailand run night food markets and cultural festivals. Desert destinations offer moonlit safaris and stargazing lodges.

Travel trend reports for 2025 point to “noctourism” as one of the fastest-growing experiential segments, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z travelers who value uniqueness, authenticity, and shareable content.

Sidebar:

Global noctourism is projected to grow



at 8–10% annually through 2028, driven by astro-tourism, night safaris, and light-free experience.

The Maldives After Dark: A Natural Competitive Edge

Unlike crowded urban areas, many atolls in the Maldives experience minimal light pollution, creating perfect conditions for dark-sky tourism. Combined with warm weather, calm waters, and unique marine phenomena, the Maldives is naturally suited to become a noctourism hotspot.

Key nocturnal assets include:

- Stunning night skies: Ideal for stargazing, astrophotography, and moonlit cruises.

- Bioluminescent plankton: Seen seasonally on several islands, creating glowing shorelines.
- Nocturnal marine behavior: Night dives reveal a completely different underwater world, from hunting moray eels to phosphorescent plankton clouds.
- Calm lagoons at night: Ideal for guided kayaking, floating spas, or nighttime paddle tours.



Experience Concepts for Maldivian Operators

Imagine if local islands, resorts, and guesthouses collaborated to develop nighttime products:

- **Stargazing Platforms:** Floating or beachside decks with telescopes, hosted by trained guides, serving tea under the stars.
- **Moonlight Reef Walks:** Guided tours on shallow reefs during full moons.
- **Bioluminescent Kayaking:** Night paddling tours over glowing plankton fields.
- **Night Dive & Snorkel Experiences:** Special packages for experienced divers to see the reef's nightlife.
- **Floating Night Lounges:** Solar-lit pontoons for evening events or private dinners.
- **Cultural Nights:** Traditional music, bonfires, and folklore under the stars in local islands.

Sustainability & Cultural Sensitivity

Noctourism in Maldives should not replicate urban light pollution. The dark sky is an asset; experiences should preserve it through low-impact lighting (e.g., red or soft LED), controlled sound, and eco-friendly infrastructure. Additionally, integrating local folklore, songs, and stories around the stars can give tours a cultural soul.



Economic & Strategic Potential

- Extended activity hours = increased spending per guest.
- New niche segments like astro-tourism and night diving.
- Stronger year-round offerings, particularly for return visitors.
- Opportunities for local youth employment as trained night guides.
- Reinforces Maldives as not just a daytime destination.



Conclusion: Time to Own the Night

The Maldives is globally known for its crystal-clear lagoons and breathtaking sunsets. But its nighttime potential remains largely untouched. With thoughtful planning, collaboration, and storytelling, noctourism could become the next chapter in Maldivian tourism — one written under the stars.

“If the day sells the Maldives, the night can make people fall in love with it.”



“Noctourism isn't about adding hours. It's about adding dimensions.”



Navigating Dreams: Mohamed Firaq and the rise of Inner Maldives.

Exclusive insights from the entrepreneur redefining travel and aviation in the Maldives.

by Rilwan

From humble beginnings to leading one of the Maldives' most influential travel and aviation companies, Mohamed Firaq has built a career defined by vision, resilience, and innovation. As the Founder and CEO of Inner Maldives, he has played a key role in shaping the country's tourism landscape.

In this exclusive interview with theArrival, Firaq reflects on his journey, the challenges facing Maldives tourism, and his vision for the future of aviation.

Firaq is a well-known name in the tourism industry. Can you take us back to the beginning, what inspired you to enter tourism?

While I was still in school, I worked part-time at a travel agency called Rover Tours, owned by the late Ever Glory Ahmed Athif and Bashima Ibrahim Rasheed. At that time, tourism was very different. Not like this digital era. Tourists arrived without online bookings, and I physically went to the airport to assist them, even helping collect luggage.

There were only a few guesthouses back then, in places like Maafushi, Gulhi, and Guraidhoo. I helped direct tourists to these islands. That experience sparked my interest in tourism. Later, when Ahmed Athif partnered with Siyam to start Sun Travel, I joined them. That was the beginning of Sun Travel.



After that, I worked with Cross world Maldives, alongside people like Latheef, Ali Faiz, and former Thaa Atoll MP Afeef. Together, we later launched a Japan-focused company called Travel 2000. Unfortunately, due to internal issues, Crossworld stopped operations. By then, I was already well known in the industry, so I decided it was time to start my own company.



Inner Maldives began at home. In my bedroom. With just a small fax machine and a typewriter. That was before emails and online systems. But even then, we could sense the industry was changing, and we grew alongside it.

Looking back, what were some of the toughest challenges you faced while building your business?

Financial difficulty was the biggest challenge. Even when I wanted to grow, there were many limitations. But certain resorts believed in me and gave me opportunities. People like the late Giraavaru Abdul Rauf, Sun Island's Ahmed Ismail, Lhohifushi's Altaf Enterprises, Embudhoo Village, and others.

At that time, we didn't even have confirmed reservations. We went to the airport with files, showed tourists resort options, and sent them directly. After years of working like this, in 2003, Inner Maldives finally became a fully recognized tour operator.

There were nights I seriously thought about giving up and working a regular job. It was frustrating, especially when there seemed to be no way forward financially. But I always tell young people now. Don't give up. When you wake up the next day, your mindset changes, and a new solution appears.

Who has influenced your career the most?

Many people supported me from the beginning. Late Giraavaru Abdul Rauf, late Bolifushi Hussain Shareef, Ahmed Ismail of Sun Island, Altaf Enterprises, Embudhoo Village, and Universal's Didi.



Even today, Didi keeps in touch with me. When I travel to Seychelles, he invites me for dinner and still offers advice. I happily accept it. He continues to introduce me to good people.

Tourism is built on trust and relationships. between resorts, airlines, tour operators, and teams. Without trust, we cannot move forward.

What advice would you give to young Maldivians starting businesses in tourism or aviation?

The most important thing is trust. keeping your word. A few bad actions by one company can affect the entire industry.

For example, in 2009, a large travel agency collapsed with massive outstanding payments. After that, resorts stopped offering credit. Today, even when we don't receive payments from overseas operators, we must still pay resorts. Sometimes USD 14,000 to 30,000 at a time.

Banks in the Maldives also require strong collateral, which makes it very difficult for new businesses. Capital is a major barrier. Many agencies survive by injecting money from other businesses. This reality must be understood before entering the industry.

How would you describe the current state of Maldives tourism?

Maldives is globally recognized, but we lack long-term planning. Sudden Policy changes especially taxes, have caused significant losses for local operators. Resorts often receive waivers or adjustments, but local agents are left out.

Foreign tour operators receive compensation; locals do not. Many operators who contributed to build this industry through sacrifice are slowly disappearing. The country needs a clear vision of how it wants to shape tourism's future.

With guesthouses expanding, how do we balance luxury tourism and local tourism?

There must be limitations. Look at Maafushi. If every island becomes like that, it could lead to a downfall. Controls should be based on island size, population, and capacity.

We also lost the charter market due to unplanned changes. New resorts should target five-star-plus standards to maintain value and revenue quality.

How do you cater to such diverse travelers?

We mostly work through partner tour operators, each serving different client segments. Today, we even handle guests arriving by private jet. Some don't want to land in Malé at all.

Maldives is beautiful, but dredging, reclamation, and harbor works negatively affect the image. This must be managed carefully.

What led Inner Maldives into aviation?

The first airline I brought to Maldives was Viva Macau from Hong Kong. I met them at an overseas trade fair and learned aviation practically.



Are there lesser-known destinations with tourism potential?

Absolutely. Maldives has world-class dive sites and rich heritage. For example, Utheemu Palace in Haa Alifu Atoll should be showcased nationally, even digitally at Velana International Airport or the Malé Museum.

With modern technology, we can promote history, culture, and natural beauty across many islands. Not just luxury villas.

Later, we became the GSA for SriLankan Airlines, followed by flydubai. Aviation in Maldives still has huge potential, but service quality must improve.

What are the biggest aviation challenges facing Maldives today?

The biggest challenge is the absence of a strong national airline. While the Maldives had opportunities to grow its own aviation sector, they were not utilized in time. As a result, many foreign airlines expanded and strengthened



their businesses by operating to the Maldives, while we fell behind. Hope to see “maldivian” airline thrive under the right leadership and expertise.

What are your thoughts on airport development?

Airports must be well planned and economically viable. Government alone cannot make them succeed. Resorts and industry players must support them.

Airports are not just for locals; tourists are the key. Hanimaadhoo, for example, could become a hub in 5–10 years. Right now, many domestic airports exist due to political decisions rather than economic logic.

Are there any upcoming aviation or travel projects you are particularly excited about?

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Are there any upcoming aviation or travel projects you are particularly excited about?

One of my long-term ambitions is to establish my own airline. Aviation is something I am deeply passionate about, and I am currently exploring joint ventures with foreign partners to make this a reality.

More than just running a travel business, I enjoy being actively involved in operations and growth. That is where my real interest lies, and aviation remains an area I am especially focused on for the future.

What innovations would you like to see in the next decade?

Human capital development is the biggest challenge. We depend heavily on foreign professionals because we lack trained locals.

Before imposing restrictions, we must first develop people. Regulations alone don't grow an economy. We need clarity, fewer conflicting laws, and a focus on retaining money within the country.

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Paradise in Motion: Maldives Tourism in 2026

by Rilwan

“The ocean isn’t just a backdrop - it’s the backbone of our tourism future,”

“The ocean isn’t just a backdrop — it’s the backbone of our tourism future,” says Ahmed Saeed, CEO of Visit Maldives Corporation. “In 2026, every visitor experiences more than resorts. They meet communities, taste our culture, and feel part of our islands’ story.”

The Maldives is already showing a new face in 2026: turquoise waters, overwater villas, and thriving coral reefs remain, but tourism is now about sustainability, community participation, and immersive experiences. Travelers don’t just visit, they live the islands.

Riding the Wave of Growth

Tourism in 2026 continues to thrive. The Maldives welcomed over two million visitors in 2025, and local operators report strong bookings for January and beyond.

“We didn’t just open a guesthouse. we opened our home,” says Fathimath Shifa, guesthouse owner in Maafushi. “Visitors are part of our island story.”

Local guesthouses and cultural tours now form the backbone of the tourism experience, complementing luxury resorts with authentic, island-driven experiences.

Connectivity Takes Flight

In 2026, direct flights from Melbourne, Australia are now operating, connecting travelers with the northern and southern atolls.

“More flight routes mean more opportunities,” says Rasheed Latheef,



Director of Airports Development. “Families in the northern atolls now receive consistent visitors, not just seasonal peaks.”

Travelers also report easier island-hopping and shorter transfer times thanks to airport and ferry upgrades.



Sustainability at the Forefront

“We measure success not only by arrivals but by protecting reefs and shorelines for future generations,” says Mariyam Aishath, sustainability lead.

Electric ferries, eco-certified resorts, and

marine restoration projects ensure that tourism growth is responsible and resilient in 2026.



Local Voices and Experiences

“The world sees luxury, but we want them to see the people, cooks, guides, artisans . who make the Maldives alive,” says Hassan Ali, cultural guide in Laamu Atoll.

Community participation in tourism is stronger than ever. Guesthouses, local tours, and cultural workshops invite visitors to engage meaningfully with island life.

Diversified Experiences

In 2026, the Maldives offers:

- Cultural immersion: craft workshops, home-cooked meals
- Adventure tourism: diving with manta rays, night safaris
- Wellness and eco-tourism: spa retreats integrated with local practices
- Community participation programs: seagrass planting, turtle monitoring

“Every atoll has its own heartbeat, and guests want to feel it. The village, the food, the crafts, not just the vista,” says Mohamed Ibrahim, tour operator in Baa Atoll.



Looking Forward

“2026 isn’t a finish line. It’s a new starting point,” says Ahmed Saeed. “What we build this year matters for our children, not just our visitors.”

Maldives tourism in 2026 is dynamic, inclusive, and sustainable, inviting.

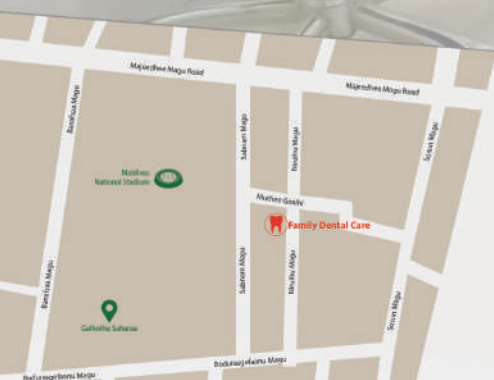


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Kattelhi: A Taste of the Deep South's Best-Kept Culinary Secret

by Nasih

In the vast, azure expanse of the Maldivian archipelago, the island of Fuvahmulah stands as a geographical anomaly. It is a lone emerald in the deep south, the only one-island atoll in the country, possessing freshwater lakes and a soil so fertile it yields fruits found nowhere else in the islands. But for the intrepid food traveler, the true allure of Fuvahmulah lies not in its soil, but in its waters.

Enter the Kattelhi (Promethichthys prometheus), or the Roudi Escolar. This deep-sea dweller is more than just a fish; it is the centerpiece of a culinary tradition that defines the identity of Fuvahmulah.

The Midnight Hunt

To understand the dish, one must understand the hunt. Unlike the surface-dwelling tuna that dominates the Maldivian diet, Kattelhi is a creature of the shadows. It lives in the "inner-sea" depths, often 200 to 400 meters down.

Fuvahmulah fishermen set out at dusk, dropping long lines into the dark abyss. The fish is notorious for its oily, rich flesh a biological necessity for surviving the pressure and cold of the deep south. This high fat content is exactly what makes it a gastronomic delicacy, often described as the "wagyu of the sea."

From the Deep to the Dish

In Fuvahmulah, the traditional preparation of Kattelhi is an exercise in beautiful simplicity. The goal is never to mask the flavor, but to elevate its natural, buttery richness.

The Kattelhi Garudhiya (Clear Fish Broth): While the rest of the Maldives enjoys tuna broth, the Fuvahmulah version using Kattelhi is transformative. Because the fish is so oily, the broth becomes milky and opaque as it simmers. Traditionally, it is cooked with nothing more than water, salt, and perhaps a few curry leaves or a piece of bilimbi (sour fruit) to cut through the richness.

The Accompaniments: To eat Kattelhi like a local, you must have the right sides: Ala (Fuvahmulah Taro): The island is famous for its taro pits. The starchy, earthy root is boiled until tender, providing the perfect canvas for the fatty fish.

The "Kattelhi Teluli" (Fried): For those who prefer a crunch, the fish is marinated in a simple Maldivian spice paste and fried until the skin is crisp, while the inside remains melt-in-the-mouth tender.

The Ritual: It is traditionally eaten with a squeeze of fresh lime and a side of "Koppee Faiy" (collard greens) salad to balance the heavy fats.

Why It Matters: A Culinary Heritage

In a world of globalized flavors, Kattelhi remains fiercely local. It doesn't travel well; the high oil content means it is best eaten fresh from the boat. This has turned Fuvahmulah into a

pilgrimage site for Maldivian foodies.

However, Kattelhi is more than a meal it is a symbol of the island's resilience. For generations, when the monsoons made reef fishing impossible, the deep-sea Kattelhi provided the protein and fats needed to sustain the islanders.

A Note for the Conscious Traveler

Because Kattelhi is so rich in wax esters, it is famously potent. Locals advise enjoying it in moderation it is a rich treat, a "slow food" meant to be savored.

If you find yourself on the shores of Fuvahmulah, skip the standard resort fare for one night. Find a local kitchen, wait for the evening catch to come in, and sit down to a bowl of Kattelhi. You aren't just eating dinner; you are tasting the deep, dark, and delicious soul of the Maldivian south.



From Memory to Momentum: Nasheed Walks the “Heart of Maafushi”

by Rilwan



A few days after the ceremonial banners were taken down and the formal speeches concluded, Maafushi felt its usual rhythm again. Children playing near the shoreline, fishermen mending their nets, and the distant hum of speedboats ferrying tourists across the turquoise lagoon. Yet, for those who witnessed it, Mohamed Nasheed’s recent visit left a lingering sense of reflection on this small island’s remarkable journey.



For many, Maafushi is not just another dot on the Maldivian map. It is the birthplace of the local guesthouse tourism revolution. Before 1998, Maldives’ tourism was almost entirely confined to resort islands. But when Maafushi opened the doors of its first guesthouse, it set a precedent that



allowed ordinary Maldivians to benefit directly from tourism. Today, there are over 170 guesthouses across inhabited islands, but it all started here. The island’s evolution from a quiet fishing community to a vibrant tourism hub is a story of foresight, courage, and community initiative.



Nasheed’s visit came in conjunction with the launch of the island’s new tourism identity: “Heart of Maafushi.” The branding reflects more than marketing. It signals the island’s confidence in its place in the Maldives’ tourism ecosystem. Walking through streets lined with guesthouses, cafés, and souvenir shops, the former president observed how far the community has come.

“It is not just about attracting tourists, but ensuring that growth benefits the people who live here,” Nasheed said during informal conversations with local entrepreneurs. His message, echoing his long-held views, emphasized sustainable growth and widening opportunity rather than increasing the tax burden on islanders.



What makes Maafushi special is not merely its scenic beauty or proximity to Malé, But it is its people. Local families took risks opening their homes as guesthouses, navigating regulations and logistics that were new to the Maldives. Over the years, Maafushi has become a model of community-driven tourism, proving that islands can thrive without the exclusive resort model.



Nasheed’s stroll through the island was symbolic but also practical. He met small business owners, listened to ideas about sustainable practices, and engaged in discussions about infrastructure improvements that would benefit both residents and visitors. The visit underscored a recurring theme in Maldivian development: progress is most meaningful when it starts at the local level.



The transformation of Maafushi is also a testament to resilience. From a sleepy fishing village to a bustling tourist destination, the island has had to balance tradition and modernization. Its streets now host an eclectic mix of local eateries, boutique guesthouses, and artisan shops, while children still play by the water’s edge as generations before them did.



As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a golden glow across the lagoon, it was easy to see why the island chose the name “Heart of Maafushi.” It is not just a destination, it is a story of ambition, adaptation, and the quiet determination of a community that has rewritten its own narrative. Nasheed’s visit may have marked a milestone, but Maafushi’s journey is ongoing, and its pulse continues to beat strong, inviting travelers to witness an island that has truly learned to define itself.

Dhiraagu Sets Sail with Double Speedboat Giveaway in Latest Promotion

by Rilwan



Dhiraagu has officially unveiled its much-anticipated promotion, confirming that two lucky customers will each win a brand-new speedboat in a campaign that has already generated widespread excitement. The announcement follows a series of playful teaser campaigns featuring two ice creams, two cakes, and two cats—cleverly building anticipation for a major reveal.

The promotion was officially launched at a press conference held at Dhiraagu’s head office, where the company announced that registration has opened today via the “Win a Boat” portal. The first speedboat winner will be announced in January 2026, while the second winner will be selected in July 2026, offering customers extended opportunities to take part.

As part of the promotion, Dhiraagu will be giving away two Yamaha Canary 28 speedboats, each powered by a 250-horsepower engine. Valued at MVR 1.1 million per boat, the prizes reflect the lifestyle and aspirations of Maldivian customers, combining performance, leisure, and premium quality.

Customers are invited to register for the promotion through Dhiraagu’s dedicated “Win a Boat” portal, where eligibility details and registration options are available. Customers who have recently joined Dhiraagu are also eligible to participate, provided they subscribe to a qualifying package.



This marks Dhiraagu’s third consecutive year of hosting a promotion with a high-value grand prize. In 2023, Dhiraagu offered a Tesla car as the main prize, followed by a Magellan 32 speedboat in 2024, reinforcing the company’s reputation for delivering exciting and meaningful rewards.

With two speedboats up for grabs and a campaign designed to engage customers nationwide, Dhiraagu’s latest promotion is set to make waves once again—bringing customers closer to winning big while staying connected.

The Falcon 510LX

We're proud to introduce the Falcon 510LX - a first-of-its-kind sport fishing yacht in the Maldives that sets a new standard for luxury, comfort, and performance on the water. Designed for both serious anglers and discerning explorers, the Falcon 510LX combines cutting-edge engineering with refined craftsmanship to deliver an unmatched experience in the Indian Ocean. Every element of this groundbreaking vessel - from its sleek exterior profile to its meticulously finished interiors - reflects a singular commitment to excellence. Whether cruising in style or chasing big game, the Falcon 510LX embodies power, precision, and sophistication.

Length Overall: 51 feet (15.54 metres)

Performance: Equipped with **quad Mercury 400hp V10 Verado** with **joystick control**, offering effortless handling, remarkable speed, and exceptional stability across open waters.



**The Falcon has landed!
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Interior: Modern, spacious, fully air-conditioned cabin with enclosed shower room and single head.

Features & Design Highlights:

- **Stable and Versatile:** Built for both family cruising and serious sport fishing adventures, the Falcon 510LX delivers exceptional stability, comfort, and maximum shade - perfect for long, sunny days at sea.
- **Advanced Navigation:** Outfitted with a **Garmin navigation suite**, including **twin 24-inch chart plotters**, ensuring precision navigation and effortless control.
- **Comprehensive Fishing Setup:** Experience every style of fishing - from **trolling, up to six lines with the 20-foot twin outriggers**, to **light and deep jigging, casting, live bait fishing, and deep drops for swordfish** - all supported by **state-of-the-art electric reels**.
- **Live Bait System:** Equipped with **twin live bait tanks** located on both port and starboard sides for maximum convenience and efficiency.
- **Immersive Entertainment:** Enjoy a **premium Fusion audio system** delivering crystal-clear sound for your favorite tunes on board.
- **Cutting-Edge Sonar:** Installed with **Live and 3D sonar** for detailed underwater imaging and precise fish targeting.
- **Powerful Radar:** The **Garmin GMR Fantom 256 open array radar** detects birds and objects within a 96NM range and as close as 6 metres, enhancing both navigation safety and fishing accuracy.
- **Enhanced Visibility:** Fitted with a **FLIR M300C ultra low-light camera** to track and identify objects even in challenging lighting conditions - ensuring safety and confidence during night operations.

Experience It Firsthand

With the arrival of the **Falcon 510LX**, the marine landscape enters a new era - setting an unprecedented standard for sport fishing excellence in the Maldives. Combining innovation, performance, and luxury, this vessel redefines what it means to fish and cruise in style.

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