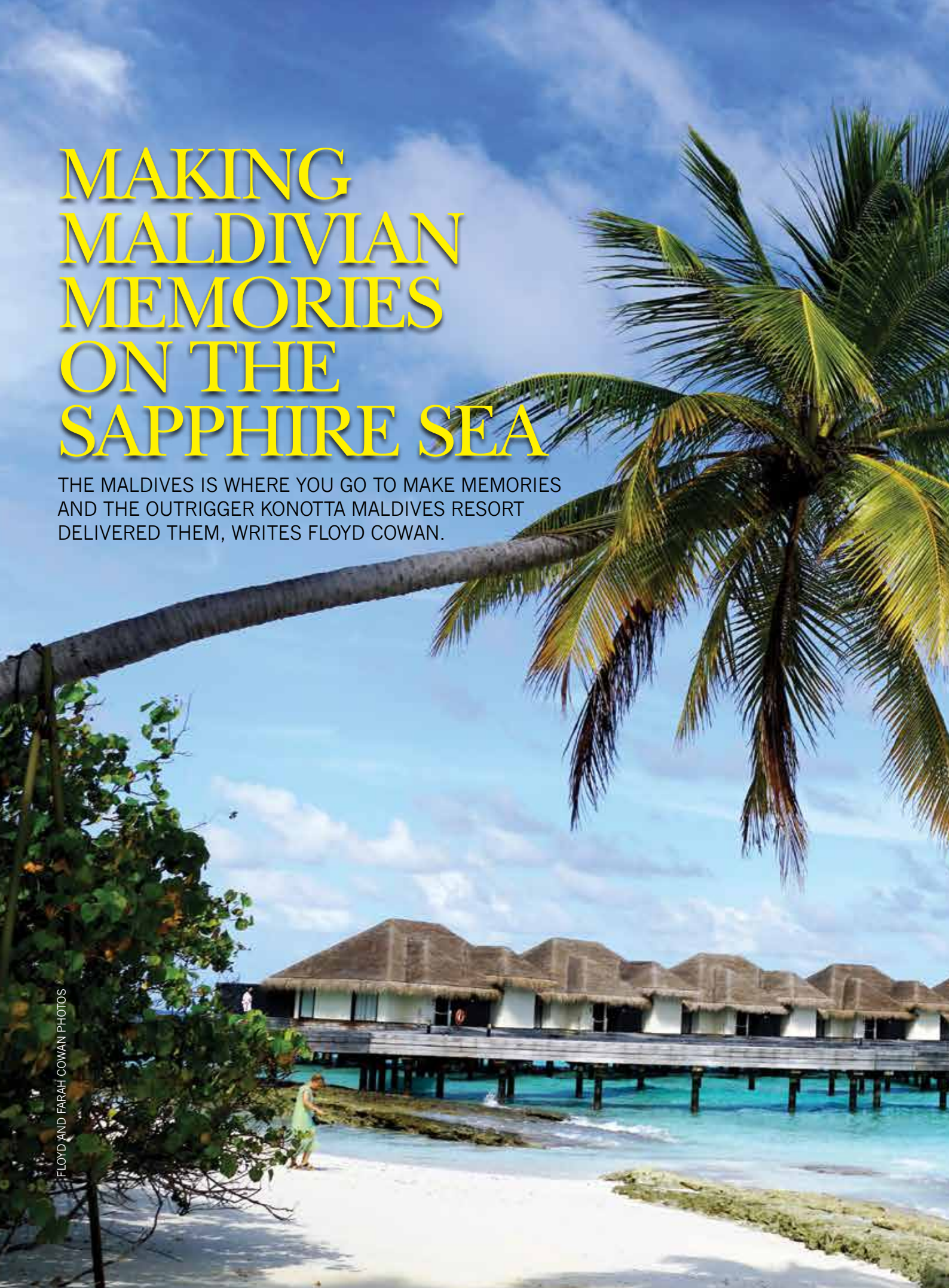


MAKING MALDIVIAN MEMORIES ON THE SAPPHIRE SEA

THE MALDIVES IS WHERE YOU GO TO MAKE MEMORIES AND THE OUTRIGGER KONOTTA MALDIVES RESORT DELIVERED THEM, WRITES FLOYD COWAN.



Farah and I settled into bubbling hot water on the second level of our Beach Villa at the Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort. Out there the sea rested gently under a full moon that beamed fat just above the black velvet horizon. With the dawn the world would glitter with azures, turquois, cyan, greens and blues that sparkle like sapphires on the sheltering sea. For now, we were content to luxuriate in our sumptuous villa, marinating in the hot tub with welcome drink close at hand. The jets billowed the water and massaged tired muscles after a long day of travel.

IN THE SILKY AIR

It had been a very civilized travel day. Our Silk Air flight from Singapore left at 10:05am for Male and 4 1/2 hours later we were in Velana International Airport at 11:30am, with the time difference handing us back the hours. Jalaal, the Outrigger representative, warmly greeted us as we came out the gate and lead us to Moonimaa Lounge where we could partake of the buffet while we waited for our flight to Kaadedhdhoo Airport.

Kaadedhdhoo Airport has the whole island to itself with no permanent residents. Once again, the Outrigger had their people on the ground waiting for us. They helped us with our luggage as we walked to the jetty to catch the speed boat for the 30-minute trip to Konotta island. Other than staff, we were the only guests on this trip. We enjoyed the wind on our skin as we absorbed the freshest of air.

NEVER MORE TROPICAL

Maldivian memories begin the moment you step off the boat and onto the jetty. Nasru and Urana warmly welcomed us and cold wet welcome drinks were most welcome. The unbelievably white sand beams as it is caressed by the sea that is so clear it could be on a mission of stealth – not to be seen. Shaded by palm trees it is picture perfect – meaning it took some time to get from the boat to our villa that was the shortest of distances away.

In the water schools of sardine and mackerels circle about and small baby reef sharks circle them. The sharks are not dangerous to me, as I am not a fish, and I watch them endlessly, fascinated. And as we walked down the jetty a turtle darted out to sea. Thrilling. Turtles may be slow on land, but in the water, they move with astounding speed.

REST & ROLL

Some people worry that there wouldn't be enough for them to do at an island resort. Had we never left our villa during our entire stay, I think I would have been quite content.





BLACK TIP REEF SHARK

The living and sleeping rooms are decadently spacious, not only allowing your body to stretch out, but your inner being to expand. The bathrooms are oversized, and numerous relaxation areas that include outdoor lounges, sun decks, the hot tub area and the private swimming pool with an always trickling wall fountain ensure you are completely comfortable in your piece of paradise. Amenities include rain showers, bathtubs, carefully stocked minibars. The two-bedroom beach pool villas have private kitchens with state-of-the-art equipment.

All accommodation is exquisite. There are 21 Beach Pool Villas, eight two-bedroom Beach Pool Villas, 21 Ocean Pool Villas, two Lagoon Pool Villas and the Grand Konotta Villa.

INSPIRED CUISINE

The innovative Maldivian cuisine goes beyond seafood. Having to meet the needs of a diverse international clientele requires creativity in the kitchen. The menu ranges from Nasi Goreng, to Fish of the Day, Char Grilled Rump Steak and Sushi. Desserts change daily, and they will satisfy the deepest craving.

One of the pleasures of breakfast at the Outrigger Konotta is eating outside in the fresh air with the sun low and gentle in the sky. The buffet offers Eastern and Western fare and those things we all enjoy – such as fresh juices and detox drinks, ice tea, ice coffee. Good coffee – available however you like it, pastries and a great quantity of bread. Items are also served a la carte. There is so much you can try something different every day. For dinners they do specialty evenings such as Moroccan Night or India Night.

We were lucky that we were there when the moon was full, and it would make an entrance as we were enjoying dinner. At the Outrigger we enjoyed many special moments. And sometimes those moments were with the staff. Their warmth went beyond hospitality, it is personality. Everyone was engaging, and we always felt as if we were being given special treatment – which everyone else received.



BEACH VILLA WITH PRIVATE POOL



JACUZZI IN BEACH VILLA



BLUE SALT

ACTIVITIES AROUND

There is much to do at Outrigger Konotta to keep even the most hyperactive child engaged. Surrounded by the crystal waters of Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll, many of the activities take advantage of the thriving reef and the playful sea.

There are Friday Night Movies, Cocktail Nights, Barbeques and you can have a private dinner on the beach. Secluded and romantic. We had breakfast and dinner at Blue Salt, but there is also Nala Rah, a Japanese restaurant providing elegant dining from the teppan grill and raw bar. It has an extensive beverage selection that includes Japanese whiskey, fine wine, sake and sochu. Poolside dining offers international, Asian and locally inspired cuisine – which you can also enjoy at your villa – and create your own menu.



DIVING & EXCURSION

THRILLING WATER SPORTS

Not surprisingly there is a world-class water sports and scuba diving at the reef centre. They have all the equipment for diving and snorkelling. There are a number of ways of getting out on the water, in the water and under the water. Take the plunge with PADI professional dive training, available for beginners and master divers. Courses in night diving and underwater photography will enhance your dive adventure.

There are Catamaran lessons and courses for beginners and experienced sailors. You can water ski, wakeboard, and kneeboard or try Seabob. The Jet Ski allows you to tour neighbouring islands or zip around the bay to spot dolphins. Or try wave surfing, windsurfing, kite surfing or parasailing. Banana boats, flying arm chairs, and other recreational equipment are also available. You can take lessons for all these activities.

ECO CONCERNS

All this beauty, in this pristine environment, makes you acutely aware that your mere presence in paradise could be the seed of its destruction. We didn't want to do anything that would negatively impact this beautiful environment – and the Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort feels the same way.

Outrigger, across all their resorts, is highly aware of its responsibility to the world in which they live and do business in. We were to get a behind the scenes look into the operations side, but first we had a session with Joan Li the new resident marine biologist who is tasked to take forward the OZONE (Outrigger's ZONE) conservation initiatives.

DREAM JOB

A Chinese national, Joan says her new job is a dream posting and she brings a boatload of enthusiasm and energy to her work. As well as education and experience. Joan studied at

the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology taking general biology, cell biology, molecular biology and marine biology.

We were joined by Jason, a young lad from China who liked to practice his English that was already pretty good. Joan gave us an overall view of the seas, but focused on coral, why they become bleached and what Outrigger OZONE's coral conservation programme is doing.

GROWING CORAL

Outrigger established its coral restoration project three years ago under previous marine biologist Caterina. New coral beds are being created with reusable steel reinforcement rods where concrete tablets, seeded with new coral, are placed. Over time, an entire reef structure grows and flourishes. Existing reef structures are carefully maintained by controlling invasive species. Joan showed

us time lapse photos where we could see the changes as the coral grows.

The total number of restored coral is now around 400 branches. "We're now looking to involve more guests to join our coral restoration activities as well as showing them the wonderful underwater world. Right now, we have 19 coral frames restored underwater as well as stone piles with new coral growing on them."

Guests can join the Outrigger's monthly coral restoration workshop and marine talk to find out more about the mysterious underwater environment. Every Wednesday and Saturday Joan gives free marine educational talks. In fact, these can be arranged anytime.

DIVE IN

For guests who can scuba dive they can take a night dive and have a look at the fluorescence corals under UV light. For those who like to snorkel, there is a group of stingrays always hanging out near the jetty. "I'd love to take the chance and show people how friendly and curious these beautiful reef sharks are. They really are portrayed in a wrong way in movies and TV shows," Joan states.

The following day Rodolfo T. Aboy, Chief Engineer, met us at the front desk and we stepped through the looking glass into a world that few guests get to see. In the Engineering Department's offices, work spaces and work yard every effort is carried out to ensure that no waste goes into the environment and no damage is done through the use of needed resources.





RODOLFO ABOY AND MUSTA FITUR

HANDLING WASTE

Water is a great challenge for a resort and the Chief Engineer explained how Outrigger meets its drinking, cooking and cleaning water needs. The water is desalinated using two 4 X 4 membranes filters. It is tested at various stages by staff hourly and a bacteriology test is done by the Ministry of the Interior every 25 days at 12 points around the island. “So far we have a perfect record,” states Rodolfo.

The department also makes still and sparkling water. They bottle 1700 bottles of water a day in high occupancy. You will find the reusable glass bottles in your room. Minerals are added to the water and they make excellent sparkling water. A special bottled washer was purchased to ensure that the bottles are perfectly clean every time they are reused.

Waste comes in many forms. Waste from the kitchen is separated and what cannot be used as compost is put with all the waste that can’t be repurposed or recycled and is taken to the garbage dump on the big island, Thilafushi, near Male where waste from all over the Maldives is dealt with. This costs the resort for one disposal trip US\$1,308 under the Eco Centro Strategy. No plastic is used on the island, but that doesn’t stop it from coming in with guests.

INNOVATIVE REPURPOSING

Used diesel is another problem that has become an asset to surrounding communities where the local people burn it in lamps. Oil that goes through the power generator, that supplies electricity to the entire resort, is also repurposed.

One of the activities that Rodolfo is most proud of is the Regifoam machine that the Engineering Department uses. Using materials such as sand and crushed glass – a lot of wine bottles – they make it into blocks for walls to sound proof rooms. At no cost to the Resort, they

make forms that can be used in a variety of ways throughout the resort. Being on a tropical island there is a great deal of plant material that needs to be crushed and composed, and the department has the machine to do that.

All the staff at Outrigger are dedicated to having zero negative impact on the environment and the Engineering Department is on the front line of that effort. Working hardest in this effort is General Manager John Allanson who had all the ideas for the Beautification of the Resort.

DOLPHIN QUEST

It wasn’t all work and no play. At 9:30am we joined Captain Nizamo and Muhai the guide, along with several other guests that included our new friend Jason and his parents, for the Dolphin Quest.

We clambered aboard the brightly coloured traditional Dhoni for our two-hour journey.

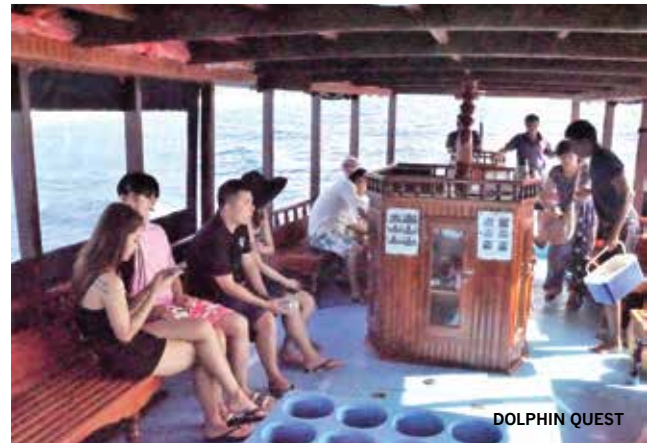
“It is not 100% guaranteed we will see the dolphins,” Muhai enthused. “But 80%.” Even without seeing dolphins it is a pleasant time on the sapphire sea, enjoying drinks, the passing islands and the enthusiasm of the staff. There was a honeymoon couple on board, along with both mothers. The two ladies looked a bit glum as they didn’t seem to take to the sea too well.

After the dolphins were seen their spirits seem to improve.

In the afternoon we boarded the “submarine”. It looks like a submarine, it gives you views that you might get from a submarine, but it doesn’t go totally underwater. Farah enjoyed this experience the most as it gave us an extended view of the reef, the coral and the many schools of colourful fish. We circled the entire island, delighting in the views.



DOLPHIN QUEST



DOLPHIN QUEST



SEMI-SUBMARINE



VIEW FROM THE SUBMARINE

Packet Guide



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SILK AIR

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HYDRO POOL AT
NAVASANA SPA

SNORKELER

NIGHT SNORKEL

NAVASANA SPA

In the afternoon of our last full day we entered a haven of tranquillity for a delightful hour of massage. The treatments are inspired by a world of cultures and lifestyles which help you discover and indulge in time-honoured traditions. These secrets have been merged into lavish body and beauty treatments, all designed for, and dedicated to, utmost relaxation. The spa provides guests with treatments that range from aromatic milk baths to Thai massage.

We couldn't linger as long as we would've liked to in the hydro pools as I was going for the night snorkel, led by Joan, who is a very experienced diver. The equipment provided was very good, the mask sealing so well to my face that I seldom had to stop to shake out water. We lowered ourselves into the gentle sea from the service jetty.

NIGHT LIFE

The sun was nearing the horizon so there were a number of people out to take pictures as it set. We started in daylight and slowly the dark gathered, changing the experience. We all had flashlights

and were asked not to shine the light right into the face of the fish or the shrimp. We enjoyed the tropical reef in the dark when different fish come out to play. The rays are more active at night and part of our group did spot one.

The swim takes 40 – 50 minutes and there is never a dull moment as the tropical reef moves up close, then drops away, as squirrel, lion and soldier fish and many others, dart about.

With only the sound of your breathing you feel you are in an entirely different world.

ECLECTIC & ELECTRIC

The world ashore has lost none of its magic either. The staff kindly take my equipment back to the Dive Centre to allow me to go to my villa that is nearby. I shower and change for dinner – our last on the island.

Hurricane lamps are set on the tables on the beach as it is barbeque night. There is music, dancers and drums to add to an already electric atmosphere. We enjoy our last evening in the moonlight once again enjoying the companionable service of, Nasru, Urana Niluka, Jameel, and Precious. We appreciated the attentive service that began before we arrived with emails from Abdulla Faiz, ensuring our travels would go well, to Tulic and Joan who ensured we were always well taken care of when we were on the island.

Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort is a memory making island with its closeness to nature and the closeness you gain to the people who do all they can to ensure your time with them is the absolute best. ❖