

# Showcasing Responsible & Sustainable Diving...

## MALDIVIAN STYLE

by  
Coral Reef CPR

The Maldives- paradise location

The Maldives has become the top tourism destination in the Indian Ocean, with numerous, luxurious resorts and boat-based dive opportunities, long stretches of white sandy beaches, calm, aquamarine lagoons, and rich and diverse coral reef ecosystems.

Live-aboard dive excursions offer unique opportunities to experience remote coral reef areas and iconic marine life - large schools of eagle rays gliding over sandy areas,

whale sharks feeding on plankton at the water's surface, and cleaning stations frequented by majestic manta rays are just a few of the highlights. Resorts offer a different, but equally rewarding experience focusing on the surrounding dive sites, snorkel trips, and swimming and relaxing on white sand beaches.

Unfortunately, just like that witnessed in other tropical regions, many of these fragile marine habitats and species are threatened by population growth, unsustainable development, pollution, overuse, and climate change. Tourism in the Maldives, in its infancy in the 1990s, is now the number one source of revenue, with over 110 resort islands, 240 additional hotels and guest houses, and over 160 live-aboard "safari" vessels, along with 70 new resorts scheduled for construction in 2017 alone.



In some cases, this rapid growth of tourism has helped conservation, spurring an end to the destructive shark finning fishery and leading to the establishment of a biosphere reserve encompassing all of Baa Atoll to protect visiting schools of manta rays. Resorts also each protect their own house reefs, which make up an extensive network of de facto marine protected areas, where fishing is prohibited so that guest can experience healthy fish populations and beautiful reef systems. Over thirty resorts have signed on to a new proposal to establish the entire country as a biosphere reserve, the first country to propose this. Yet, human pressure from over 1.2 million visitors each year can cause negative impacts - only a select number of these operations promote low impact, sustainable ecotourism through certified environmentally friendly seafood, recycling, reusable water bottles, and alternative energy sources such as wind power and solar for water production, lights and air conditioning.

Given the large importance of tourism as a source of jobs and revenue, and the connections with healthy reef systems, Coral Reef CPR has partnered with Anantara Resorts and Carpe Diem Maldives Fleet to offer ecotourism opportunities where divers and snorkelers work side by side with renowned marine biologists to collect valuable scientific data, conduct reef clean-up efforts and implement coral gardening initiatives.

Interested divers have three different and unique options to contribute to the conservation and restoration of Maldivian coral reefs. The first two involve an alternative dive experience on board the Carpe Diem Maldives Fleet, where our scientists provide daily seminars and training sessions for conservation-minded divers while simultaneously involving them in reef conservation projects. Through a 7 or 10 day excursion, you can learn from a coral reef expert who has over 25 years experience working on coral reefs. You will receive training in coral reef ecology, species identification, reef threats, and conservation strategies while also becoming citizen scientists where you conduct reef assessments and fish surveys, remove coral-eating starfish, or plant new corals onto a damaged reef. The third option we are offering is shore-based, where you are intimately involved with two of our scientists in a large coral rehabilitation program at two different resorts, one on Baa Atoll and South Malé Atoll.

### 1. The marine conservation diving trip

The aim of these marine conservation live-aboard trips are: (i) to collect valuable data on the state of coral reef ecosystems in the Maldives; (ii) address threats to corals through removal of pest species, (iii) learn how to conduct scientific assessments and surveys and how to identify fish, coral and benthic life and; (iv) experience the iconic reef ecosystems and









marine life that inhabit the Maldives. The course will be led by the founder and lead scientist of Coral Reef CPR, Dr Andrew Bruckner. He has over 25 years experience on reefs around the world, and has logged over 12,000 dives!

You will leave the live-aboard trip with a new perception on coral reefs, an insight into scientific diving and a comprehensive knowledge on the marine life in these waters- you will never dive the same way again!

### Why dive with a difference?

Live-aboard excursions include 7 and 10 day explorations with separate routes targeting



northern and central atolls, and central and southern atolls. Each day includes the opportunity for up to 4 dives in different locations, training session and an evening seminar, with time to relax and enjoy local Maldivian and International cuisine!

The spacious Carpe Diem Fleet's boat includes single and double occupancy cabins, each with an ensuite, a large shared lounge area with WI-FI and television, outdoor restaurant and bar and a sundeck with ample sunbathing areas. One of the fleet's boats even has a hot tub. A separate traditional Maldivian diving dhoni holds all dive gear and tanks, making all diving activities

40 - SEVENSEAS

smooth and hassle free. Packages include 3 to 4 dives a day.

### Sample Itinerary: 7 day trip

**Day 1** Check dive and an introduction to the Maldives and its underwater world

**Day 2** Early morning manta ray dive; reef fish photography and identification workshop; afternoon drift dives to become familiar with Indian Ocean fishes; coral reef ecology seminar

**Day 3** Early morning deep pinnacle dive for sharks and pelagics; shark and ray workshop (ecology, biology, conservation); afternoon reef fish assessments; evening coral reef ecology seminar

**Day 4** Early morning channel dive; training in coral identification and survey approaches with in-water practice; afternoon turtle dive with evening seminar on their ecology, identification and conservation measures

**Day 5** Early morning reef wall dive for invertebrates; invertebrate identification session; night dive

**Day 6** Assessment on reefs impacted by crown-of-thorns starfish; starfish ecology workshop and dives to remove starfish and coral-eating snails; evening seminar on coral reef threats

**Day 7** Whale shark and/or manta ray snorkels and dives; debrief on skills learned and trip highlights

Please note that a scheduled itinerary may differ due to seasonal and weather restrictions, and may include alternative options, such as: coral nursery establishment, coral disease workshops etc.

Depending on diver interest, individuals can specialize and focus on fish, corals or invertebrates for more in-depth learning. Divers are responsible for flights to the Maldives and the cost of the live-aboard (varied depending on cabin choice) and a contribution for the

conservation workshops and experience with Coral Reef CPR scientists that supports the ongoing research program in the Maldives.

### 2. An alternate live-aboard experience- protect the reefs!

From May 13-21 2017, divers can also join a special 7 day live-aboard dive excursion that will focus solely on the removal of crown of thorns starfish (COTS). Two boats from the Carpe Diem Fleet (Carpe Diem and Carpe Vita) will be deployed to atolls where there are ongoing population explosions of the voracious coral-eating starfish (*Acanthaster planci*). Divers will be trained in low-tech methods to collect the starfish. Each buddy team will receive large mesh goody bags, gloves, and PVC pipes for the collection of the starfish. Each time they fill up a bag, they will send it to the surface using a safety sausage, and bags will be collected by the boat crew for disposal. Concurrently, they will aid the scientists in the collection of valuable data and samples of the starfish tube feet, so we can better understand their origin and work towards devising a strategy to prevent future outbreaks. The cost for this opportunity is 750 USD pp (supplement 100 USD for upper deck cabin) and includes food, government taxes, ensuite cabin and a contribution to coral reef conservation.



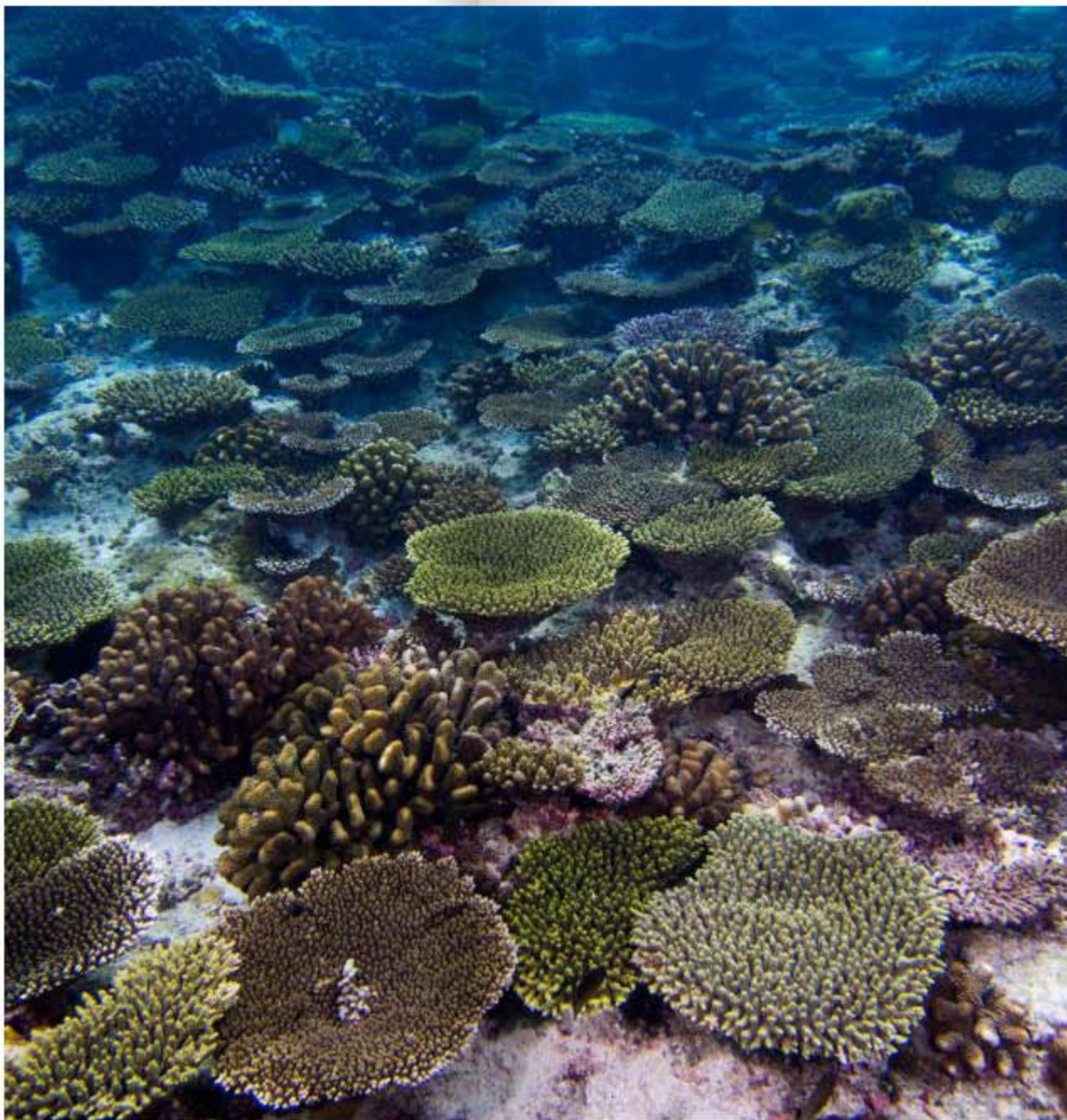


### 3. Coral gardening research missions – a very hands-on conservation opportunity

In response to a devastating El Niño event that peaked in April/May 2016, Coral Reef CPR has begun implementing approaches to rejuvenate badly damaged coral reefs. Throughout the country branching, staghorn and table corals (mostly *Acropora* spp.) were killed as the water temperatures heated above 31-32° C. We have identified some survivors of the bleaching event, what we call 'super corals' because they are resilient and did not bleach this year. These identified corals include broken branches and fragments that have accumulated on the reef slope and bases of the reef, as well as certain reefs that resisted bleaching. We are using small branches from these corals in our coral nurseries, producing new colonies that we will eventually transplant back onto damaged reefs.

A small team, including two volunteer divers, will work directly with our highly experienced scientists to establish and expand coral nurseries, help maintain the nurseries and monitor the survival and growth of the corals. The divers will learn how to fragment corals, attach them to the nursery materials, and measure and photograph them. This will include additional opportunities to participate in low-tech efforts to eliminate coral predators, and exploratory dives to identify and characterize surrounding reefs. Trips would be from 2 to 3 weeks. Divers would be based for half the time on South Malé Atoll and the second half on Baa Atoll. Divers are provided with lodging, meals, dive equipment rental and all transfers from the airport, including a sea plane ride. The divers are responsible for their airfare to the Maldives and a portion of the research costs provided to Coral Reef CPR (approximately 2000 USD per person for three weeks). This is ideal if you want to gain hands-on conservation experience, and really contribute to saving Maldivian coral reefs while working at these beautiful resorts.

For more information please visit [www.coralreefcpr.org](http://www.coralreefcpr.org) or contact us directly at [coralreefcpr@gmail.com](mailto:coralreefcpr@gmail.com) to express interest.



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MALDIVES**