

PRESS RELEASE

Anantara Launches Coral Protection and Regeneration Programme in the Maldives: Holistic Approach to Reef Protection (HARP)

Bangkok, May 2016: For over 15 years the team at Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas has been committed to protecting the local environment, communities and culture around each of its hotels and resorts whilst creating authentic, luxury travel experiences and indigenous adventures for modern travellers. With four luxury resorts in the Maldives - Anantara Kihavah Villas, Anantara Dhigu Resort, Anantara Veli Resort and Naladhu Maldives – guests can take their pick from some of the best locations and experiences in the Indian Ocean, including getting up close and personal with the local marine life and vibrant coral reefs, snorkelling with manta rays in a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, free diving with whale sharks or cruising the house reef 18 metres below the surface, just a few strokes out from the shoreline.

In line with the luxury hospitality brand's philosophy that environmental responsibility begins at home, the Anantara team in the Maldives joined forces with marine biologists from Coral Reef CPR - conservationists, biologists and ecologists whose mission is to reduce threats and promote sustainable management and rehabilitation of reef ecosystems - in October 2015 to develop ways to protect the coral ahead of the anticipated environmental stresses of El Niño, a climate cycle that has a global impact on weather patterns.

Led by Chief Scientist, Dr. Andrew Bruckner, the pioneering five-year programme, Holistic Approach to Reef Protection or 'HARP', encompasses practical environmental protection and marine education with the goal of limiting potential damage to the reefs in the Maldives and ensuring the coral reefs continue to not only survive, but to thrive. As well as Anantara taking its responsibility to the local environment very seriously, the programme will also ensure that guests at each resort – as well as the local community – can continue to enjoy the spectacular world beneath the waterline for many years to come.

Corals in the Maldives

Extending across the expansive Laccadive Sea in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is a country of atolls; small coral islands encircled by azure lagoons. Unique to the Maldives, luxury resorts are the sole occupants of each island, providing a truly private and unique experience. Coral reefs beneath the shimmering waters of the Maldives protect the pristine beaches and guard the crystal-clear lagoons. They also support an astounding array of tropical fish, crustaceans and bizarre-looking molluscs. But for all of its beauty and apparent resilience, coral is a sensitive organism, vulnerable to extreme weather, sudden environmental changes, the effects of global climate change, as well as outbreaks of coral predators.

LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

Principal investigator and lead scientist with Coral Reef CPR, Dr. Andrew Bruckner, explains: *“Some reefs in the Maldives are experiencing unusually high water temperatures which is causing coral bleaching. These coral animals contain symbiotic single-celled algae within their tissues, which provide the coral with up to 90% of its energy. Once stressed, the coral expels these algae, causing them to turn completely white. If algae loss is prolonged and the stress continues, corals can die. But it’s not all doom and gloom, when a coral turns white, it is not dead and if the stress-caused bleaching is not severe, coral can recover.”*

Director of Conservation for Minor Hotels, John Roberts, elaborates further: *“On their first visit in October 2015 the visiting marine biologists performed a major Crown of Thorns Starfish removal from the reefs surrounding Anantara resorts in South Male Atoll. In the process, the scientists helped save a great reef on Anantara Veli Resort, which is now also proving most resilient to current bleaching. As part of those efforts last year, Coral Reef CPR and Anantara have produced a manual to distribute throughout the country outlining best practice should there be another Crown of Thorns Starfish outbreak.”*

Taking A Holistic Approach To Reef Protection (HARP)

In collaborating with leading experts in their fields for ground-breaking marine biology research, Anantara is pioneering the HARP programme. Currently all project work undertaken in the Maldives by Coral Reef CPR for HARP is funded by the Anantara initiative ‘Dollars For Deeds’, whereby Anantara guests are invited to donate one dollar for each night of their stay, which is then matched dollar for dollar by Minor Hotels. Dollars for Deeds funds raised in the Maldives are committed over the coming five years to three key focus areas: protection of marine and coastal environments; environmental education; and community welfare.

In January this year, Coral Reef CPR returned to the Maldives for the first of four monitoring phases throughout 2016. Ten monitoring stations were set up on coral reefs surrounding Anantara resorts in South Male Atoll and Baa Atoll, with the purpose of evaluating the water conditions and marine populations before, during and post 2016 El Niño phenomena. Already widely reported by international media across the globe as being the longest El Niño on record, during Coral Reef CPR’s second visit to the Maldives in April this year, promising results have been extracted from the monitoring stations, despite some alarming findings.

“Since the beginning of March, temperatures on the reef have exceeded 30°C and they remained above 31°C during April, reaching 32 - 33 °C in lagoonal environments,” explains Dr. Andrew Bruckner. *“Under normal conditions, sea water temperatures should be 3-4 degrees cooler at depth but these high temperatures are extending beyond 35 metres depth. These high water temperatures are due to an unprecedented El Niño event which is now in its second year. Simultaneously the sea has been unusually calm which has allowed excessive levels of UV light radiation to penetrate the reefs.”*

“Due to stressful conditions corals in some areas in the Maldives began to pale in colour at the beginning of April and several sensitive species bleached white. By mid-April between 60-80% of corals on the reef we were monitoring were fully bleached or a very light yellow in colour.”

LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

In certain shallow lagoonal environments bleaching was much more severe, and sensitive corals were affected. On a positive note, by the end of April temperatures on Baa Atoll had begun to decline and there was very little coral mortality on the outer reefs."

SUPER CORALS

Through this research some surprising and exciting revelations have been discovered. Georgia Coward, Project Manager and Fishery Biologist with Coral Reef CPR said: *"Although the level of bleaching is similar to that reported during previous El Niño events and is comparable to reports from other countries, we have observed a number of colonies of each species that have proven resistant to changing conditions, possibly by producing protective fluorescent pigments. Similarly certain colonies have not bleached at all despite being located adjacent to corals of the same species that bleached severely. We refer to these as "super corals" and feel that these may have adapted to elevated sea temperatures. Over the coming months we will be analysing extracts taken from the super corals and other coral species in laboratory conditions, as well as looking closely at the fish population reports surrounding them."*

SUSTAINABILITY

In line with Anantara's commitment to sustainability and a result of the luxury hospitality brand's ongoing conservation efforts including the HARP project, Anantara Kihavah Villas, Anantara Dhigu Resort, Anantara Veli Resort and Naladhu have all been awarded with Green Growth Certification, an assessment framework for the travel and tourism industry which consists of 37 criteria and 406 indicators. It is based on global standards and international conventions including the UN Global Compact and the UNEP Green Economy Principles.

FUTURE VISITS

Since 2011, guests staying at Anantara resorts in South Male Atoll and Baa Atoll have been able to leave a lasting legacy by participating in coral reef propagation programmes and contribute to the ongoing conservation effort by adopting a coral frame and planting it with the guidance of Anantara's resident marine biologists. The HARP programme now builds on those initial efforts, with a high level scientific-based practical approach to reef assessment, regeneration and community science.

The third and fourth phases of the HARP Programme with Anantara involve creating a coral nursery to assist in the rehabilitation of degraded and damaged reefs. Through coral mariculture, when the scientists return in July and October 2016, small branches from the identified super corals will be extracted and propagated. Once matured, these corals will be transplanted back on to the reef.

During the visits from Coral Reef CPR scientists, guests at the Anantara resorts in both South Male Atoll and Baa Atoll can enhance their diving and snorkelling experiences by joining the marine biologists on their excursions, and participate in Anantara's endeavours to keep the reefs healthy and vibrant for generations to enjoy.

LIFE IS A JOURNEY.



Future visits from Dr. Andrew Bruckner, Georgia Coward and other Coral Reef CPR scientists are set for the end of July until mid-August 2016 and October 2016. To select your Anantara Dhigu, Anantara Veli, Anantara Kihavah Villas or Naladhu Maldives experience and to help play a part in the protection and regeneration of coral reefs in the Maldives, visit anantara.com or email reservations.maldives@anantara.com.

ENDS

Editor's Notes:

Anantara is a luxury hospitality brand for modern travellers, connecting them to genuine places, people and stories through personal experiences, and providing heartfelt hospitality in the world's most exciting destinations. The collection of distinct, thoughtfully designed luxury hotels and resorts provides a window through which to journey into invigorating new territory, curating personal travel experiences.

From cosmopolitan cities to desert sands to lush islands, Anantara connects travellers to the indigenous, grounds them in authentic luxury, and hosts them with passionate expertise. The portfolio currently boasts over 30 stunning properties located in Thailand, the Maldives, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Mozambique, Zambia, the UAE and Qatar, with a pipeline of future properties across Asia, the Indian Ocean, Middle East and Africa. For more information on Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas, please visit www.anantara.com.

Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/anantara; Twitter and Instagram: @anantara_hotels

About Global Hotel Alliance:

Founded in 2004, and based on the airline alliance model, Global Hotel Alliance ("GHA") is today the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands. GHA uses a shared technology platform to drive incremental revenues and create cost savings for its member brands, and operates a multi-brand loyalty programme, DISCOVERY, which has over six million members. GHA's member brands encompass over 550 upscale and luxury hotels with 110,000 rooms across 76 different countries. For more information visit www.gha.com

For media enquiries, please contact Anantara's PR Office: Tel: + 66 (0) 2 365 7500

Bryony Gammon
Director of PR & Communications
Minor Hotel Group
Email: bgammon@minor.com

Elizabeth Smailes
Cluster Director of Marketing Communications
Anantara Kihavah Villas, Anantara Dhigu Resort, Anantara Veli Resort and Naladhu Maldives
Email: esmailes@minor.com / Telephone: +960 664 4100

LIFE IS A JOURNEY.