

## MALDIVES

# Aquaman's undersea realm

*Joseph Lassus is a passionate advocate of marine ecology in the Maldives. As the new marine biologist at Anantara Kihavah Villas, he educates guests about the republic's rich azure waters. He tells Fah Thai why conservation is different in this region and reveals the lesser-known aquatic attractions*



## What's special about the Maldives?

Here in the Maldives the main territory is made of water, therefore you could argue that marine life is more important than anything else. Here, the rich Indian Ocean waters flow through thousands of tiny islands and this generates a tremendous amount of marine diversity, from tiny anemone fish to huge whales. Anantara is part of the Baa Atoll UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve and we're heavily involved with marine

protection – we implement coral reef regeneration programmes and promote activities like snorkelling and dolphin-watching sustainably.

## Your favourite spot in the Maldives?

My experience in the Maldives is based around the island I work on, Kihavah, from where we reach a number of spots all over the Baa Atoll. Most are meant to be explored via scuba-diving, with my personal preferences being Dhigu

Thila, Kakani Thila and Undoodhoo Thila. When the conditions are okay, go for a channel dive at Bathalaa Kanduu.

## Have you spotted anything rare?

Species can still be spotted here which are unlikely to be encountered on a daily dive. I'm still amazed every time I cross paths with a honeycomb moray, for example, and I feel incredibly lucky any time I spot a new type of nudibranch I've never seen before. [anantara.com](http://anantara.com)



*At just 23, Aishath "Rizu" Rizma is the Maldives' first female boat captain. Fah Thai meets the aqua-fanatic, who's an inspiration for a generation of women in her home country*

## Who inspires you?

The women in my family: my mum is the same as me, not very girly! She taught me how to swim and she's a very good swimmer. Even today she's better than me. She still plays netball and volleyball sometimes. And my grandmother is 67 and can still climb trees! She always climbs the Maldivian nut trees to get nuts for me; she's really fast. In the old days, women used to dive and swim to collect cowry shells and things like that. I think maybe it comes from there.

## Why did you become a boat captain?

I used to go fishing and sailing with my father when I was small. When I was 20, I started working at Kurumba. It was my first job and early on I considered

quitting every day because I didn't like talking to people. But after a month I was talking to everyone and I started diving. Later, I was asked if I wanted to become a captain. The first few days were quite a challenge. I didn't know which was forward and which was back! But the crew was really helpful from the start. Now it feels like a vacation, not work. When I'm driving a boat I feel proud, cool and free.

## What is the next big adventure?

It was my dream to drive a boat. I love to drive anything. But I've always wanted to visit every island in the Maldives: this was always my dream. Before, I would've had to charter a boat and get a captain. But now I can do it myself! [kurumba.com](http://kurumba.com)

## The originals

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*Nashid Lathif, the helmer of Maldives Originals, a non-profit art collective, outlines its altruistic aims*



"We're a unique, not-for-profit art collective supporting local design, art and culture across the Maldives with unique, hand-made local products. As a young initiative, our catalogue of products is constantly growing with each new craftsperson who joins. We encourage hotels to buy locally hand-made gifts. Any profit generated is funnelled into arts and cultural projects – construction of our first community arts centre is now completed and regular training programmes are under way. Many of our artists have families to look after and choose to work from home, others work collectively at friends houses or find pleasure in working from our centre surrounded by other like-minded souls." [maldivesoriginals.com](http://maldivesoriginals.com)

