

THE MALDIVES ARE GROWING IN POPULARITY



Visitor numbers to the Maldives are on the rise and local travel companies, like recently established Secret Paradise, are convinced that not only do they fully understand the desires that are really drawing people to the islands; they are best equipped to help these tourists experience the real Maldives. Figures show that tourist numbers rose by an impressive 11.9% to half a million by the end of May. 27% of that share came from China, a growing Asian market that appreciates the safe feel of the islands and 48.3% were European. Many come for the beauty of the islands and many more come for rest and relaxation, with the understandable idea that the resorts are the perfect place to lie on a beach and do nothing. Others, however, feel there is more to the Maldives than these stereotypical aspects, that there is an incredible culture to discover and a life to, and beneath, those calm ocean waters that tourists are beginning to appreciate.

Modern, understanding operators like Ruth Franklin (Director of Sales of Secret Paradise) are tapping into this rise in popularity with new tourism experiences.

It is this abundance of unique culture and the opportunities for diving that the inbound travel operator [Secret Paradise](#) see as the key reason for a continued sense of popularity in the islands as a destination; tourists are realising that they can experience so much more beyond the resorts and capital and local businesses are going to great lengths to accommodate these needs. The local culture is a key aspect to these new experiences and Miss Franklin is keen for visitors to see island life through interaction with Maldivians, crafts lessons, cooking classes and traditional meals with families rather than standard hotel packages and restaurants. The number of registered accommodation options at the end of May was 460 and these include some interesting alternatives to the 105 luxury resorts that the company would recommend. The new guest house island policy, which has been welcomed by this rising Chinese market, allows for the development of guest house islands following the ongoing rise in guest houses alongside local communities.

The way that Miss Franklin and her company really showcase the potential of the islands is through their guided adventure tours and diving packages. They believe that the “idyllic white beaches, turquoise lagoons and coral reefs abundant with marine flora and fauna should be available to everyone regardless of budget” and they provide trips of different sizes and purposes to give tourists the best local experience in this environment. Furthermore, the respect shown for the local cultures and customs, such as obeying dress codes, continues with a respect for the island's life and sustainability and an environmental conscience.

As the islands' popularity continues to increase, local companies and accommodation providers will ensure that visitors see the best of this archipelago.

Simply put, the Maldives is a destination that is highly diverse in what it can offer to tourists and is improving on this diversification and accessibility all the time. It seems that many visitors from Asia and Europe are keen to see the wonders for themselves and operators like Secret Paradise know this and have found brilliant ways to cater to growing trends and showcase the Maldives islands.

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