

The sunny side of life

By **ABDULLA ZIYATH**

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ABDULLA ZIYATH holds a Bachelor's Degree with Honors in Business from the UK as well as a Masters of Business Administration from Australia. Early in his career he worked as an Assistant Director at the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development and later founded and operated a successful Advertising and Public Relations company in the Maldives. As Managing Director of MMPRC he heads both destination and investment promotion for the tourism sector of the Republic of Maldives. He is also mandated to execute the pilot integrated resort project in Laamu Atoll by the President of Maldives.

Set up in 2010 as a government company, the Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC) is the branch of the national tourism office of Maldives responsible for promoting the country internationally.

We have just launched our Visit Maldives Year 2016 campaign, taking advantage of the 27th UNWTO conference at the Bandos Island Resort, here, in June. The official VMY 2016 campaign logo was revealed by His Excellency President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom during the opening of the conference, which coincides with year-long celebrations to mark the 50th Anniversary of Independence of the Maldives.

Over the course of the coming months national and international events will take place over the second half of the year, along with educational and awareness programmes, competitions, and attractive prizes such as free holidays to the Maldives.

Our goal now is to increase visitor arrivals by 1.5 million. We are doing this by continuing to position the Maldives as an exclusive tourist destination, showcasing the islands' diversified tourism product.

The MMPRC's slogan for marketing Maldives as a tourist destination is "The Sunny Side of Life". To project this message internationally, we will be focusing on electronic media, particularly the social networks to reach our main market segments.

This will involve stressing the different sides to a holiday in the Maldives. The present set of positioning statements used by MMPRC remains valid with one addition related to increased interaction with the local population and their culture:

- Maldives... the romantic side of life for honeymooners and couples to portray absolute privacy associated with the Maldives product
- Maldives... the colourful side of life for scuba divers and underwater enthusiasts to portray the vibrant and colourful coral reefs and their flora and fauna
- Maldives... the thrilling side of life for watersports lovers and adventure seekers to convey the wide range of watersports and other thrilling activities that Maldives offers
- Maldives... the spiritual side of life for tourists who seek revitalisation of their body and mind to communicate the spa and wellness product of the Maldives
- Maldives... the human side of life for tourists seeking

to combine their beach resort holiday with interaction with the lifestyles of local people

The consistent positioning of Maldives as portrayed in travel media and tour operators' brochures and websites is as a by word for luxury, romance and tropical bliss; a beautiful string of low-lying coral islands in the Indian Ocean, and a paradise for watersports enthusiasts and sun seekers alike. Whatever activities visitors may wish to engage in while in Maldives, they are drawn in the first place by this perception of the country as an idyllic, "halo" destination. Maintaining this image and perception is, thus, the primary task of the country's destination marketing organisation.

Our ongoing campaign showcases the islands' diverse tourism product through a range of national and international activities planned throughout the year, including events taking place across the Maldives, educational and awareness programmes, and competitions. It will also coincide with the Maldives being the official partner country of ITB Berlin 2016, one of the world's largest travel fairs.

We will also be taking our message to the world via more roadshows. In order to achieve good value-for-money from marketing expenditure and to focus on the key producers of tourists to Maldives, there is the need to scale back on participation at overseas trade and consumer fairs, in favour of smaller, more focused events targeting tour operators and travel agents.

Having already welcomed an increase in visitor arrivals from the UK, including an 8% increase in UK tourists during the first three months of 2015, we look forward to welcoming even more visitors from the UK during this exciting time.

Maldives tourism will be shaped over the next five years by a changing balance in the international marketplace, a process that has been occurring since 2008 and will continue in the short to mid term, and possibly beyond. This balance will likely see our dependence on European visitors shift toward a greater balance with arrivals from China, Russia, and Asia.

Whether you are looking for the chance to simply relax or live life to the full exploring a beautiful, pristine tropical island nation, Maldives offers the ideal holiday, either staying in a peaceful, high standard island resort, diving or surfing on world class sites or taking an adventurous cruise to islands where you can interact with the Maldivian population. **F**