

Night fishing in Villingili - Part 2

The fish keeps picking on your line. Hurriedly you pull the line in, but the fish had gotten away. Strike one.



Biosphere Expeditions coming to Maldives

BY MALDIVES TRAVELLER STAFF
06 FEBRUARY 2011



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On a planet that's 4.5 billion years old, the origins of life itself have been estimated at around 3.5 billion years ago. And from there, the Biosphere as we know it has evolved from the ashes and unprotected solar radiation into the lush green soothing environment that we live in.

The Earth's biosphere is a closed system, with the exception of solar and extra-solar radiation. This massive collection of ecosystems in which all living things interact with each other as well as the atmosphere, the seas and the lands should exist in a harmonious balance, except that man, in the prime of his evolution had started to encroach upon the lairs of fauna and flora on the Earth.

As a balance that took several millennia to reach equilibrium is disrupted within the span of decades, the animals react and the plants die, accelerating the disturbance. In a world where conservation of the biosphere has become a burning need, and the maintenance of biodiversity had become an international call, Biosphere Expeditions has been working in the flow for more than 11 years.

Biosphere Expeditions is the brainchild of Dr. Matthias Hammer, a trained biologist with experience in the army. Currently, Biosphere Expeditions has a multinational presence and a broad range of cultural and international wealth in its team from all walks of life and of all ages.

The Maldives, currently under the international spotlight as the posterchild of environmental issues requires attention towards the rich and densely populated reefs of the 1192 islands that make up the island nation. Although the ecology of the reefs are well off when compared to other regions of the world, they stand to suffer a lot in the tides of climate change that can affect sea levels.

This is slightly paradoxical as sea levels can be thought to have no effect on reefs as they are underwater. However, any change in the sea level can cause less or more sunlight on corals, which directly influence their growth patterns. As reef fish are quite dependent on the corals that abound in the turquoise lagoons of the atolls of Maldives, and the deep see fish have a further dependency on the reef fish, we see that the Maldives has a lot to lose in terms of environment and also in terms of economy as it is based mainly on fishing and tourism.

Quoted in a press statement by Biosphere Expeditions, Hussein Zahir, the Maldives' Marine Research Centre's Senior Reef Ecologist, stated "We are very grateful for the support of Biosphere Expeditions and its partners in our research efforts. Biosphere Expeditions is a great model for tourism and research combined and we need more of this on the Maldives. The Maldives are literally built on coral reefs - not

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just geophysically, but also in terms of our economy. Although we have so much reef-based tourism, our own capacity to do surveys is actually quite small. The many resorts and liveboard dive boats that exist on the Maldives are not geared up for coral reef surveys, so through Biosphere Expeditions we aim to showcase that tourism and research can go hand-in-hand for the benefit of all".

Dr. Hammer, the Executive Director of Biosphere Expeditions and Reef Check Trainer was quoted saying, "The coral reefs of the Maldives archipelago and the fish populations that live amongst them are extraordinarily diverse and rich. They are also in a relatively pristine state and having both these factors together is quite rare. As less than one per cent of the world's oceans are protected, it is very important that we monitor and manage areas that are doing well. This is especially true for the Maldives, where the economy and well-being of an entire nation is largely dependent on a healthy & sustainably managed marine environment. We are delighted to be working with the Maldivian government and people, as well as being trailbreakers in showing how tourism, sustainability and research can all gel together well."

Travellers from the United States of America who are experienced divers and with minimum certification of PADI Open Water certificate, or equivalent can participate in collecting data on corals, and marine wildlife under the guidance of a marine scientist who will train and oversee their work in the Maldives, working along with Reef Check and the Marine Conservation Society.

Kathy Gill, Strategy Director from Biosphere Expeditions has stated that "The coral reefs of the Maldives archipelago and the fish populations that live amongst them are extraordinarily diverse and rich. They are also in a relatively pristine state and having both these factors together is quite rare. As only less than one per cent of the world's oceans are protected it is very important that we monitor and manage areas that are doing well."

The cost of the expedition that takes place from September 10th-16th, 2011 is \$2570 per person, excluding travel. The main station of the expedition will be a modern cruise safari that will be able to take the volunteers to the locations as required.

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