

Sharks at Risk in the Maldives

Globally, over 100 million sharks are killed annually, often as by-catch, but primarily just to satisfy the demand for shark fin soup, which is at an all-time high. As affluence grows in Asia, so does the market for luxury items. One recent study estimated that fins from between 26 and 73 million sharks are traded globally each year, while reported world trade in fins has nearly tripled. During the finning process, a shark is hauled up on deck, its fins sliced off, and the animal, many times still alive, is thrown back into the sea to die a slow death. This practice is not only cruel; it is also incredibly wasteful and unsustainable and rapidly depletes these top predators from our oceans. The consequences of this for the whole marine environment will be disastrous.

The number of sharks deliberately killed for their fins (and to a much lesser extent for their meat and oil) has been a great concern in the Maldives as well. The killing has resulted in a severe decline in the number of shark sightings in most atolls over the last few years, which continues to be a big disappointment to resort guests, many of whom visit hoping to see these animals.

Together with local activists, nearby resorts and international conservation groups, Soneva Fushi has been working to get a nationwide ban on shark fishing imposed. The resort sent out emails and letters to nearly 90 tourist resorts, 70 dive centres, approx. 300 travel agents in the Maldives and tour operators worldwide, hoping to get their support for the campaign. It also developed informative leaflets, funded a TV campaign and initiated discussions with local authorities to highlight the detrimental effects of shark-fishing to marine ecosystems and the tourism and fishing industries.

The struggle is not yet won, but progress in the right direction was made in March 2009, when the killing of reef sharks all over the Maldives was prohibited. The ban will be extended to all of the country's territorial waters in 2010, thereby paving the way to a complete ban on the export of all shark products.



Soneva Fushi Opens Its Waste-to-Wealth Centre

On March 28, Soneva Fushi officially inaugurated Eco Centro, a designated place where the waste generated by the resort operations is turned into valuable products.

Eco Centro is an integrated waste management site, designed to use permaculture principles to create a working environmental education model for recycling waste to wealth and the sustainable use of water, energy, land and localisation. The concept of WELL (Water, Energy, Land, & Localization) is based on the principle that by localising our water supply, energy production and land needs we can vastly reduce wastage, food miles and carbon pumped into the atmosphere.

Through Eco Centro, nearly 80% of waste generated from our operation will be converted into good use. Woody waste (biomass) is converted to charcoal for use in our kitchens and biochar, a soil nutrient, through a process known as pyrolysis. A further upgrade of the system with the addition of a wood gasification unit planned for next year will generate enough electricity to power the nearby Fresh in the Garden restaurant and Cinema Paradiso. Organic kitchen waste is converted to biogas and liquid fertiliser for use in our gardens through a subsurface irrigation system. All cardboard and paper is used for making garden compost, which will also be shared with surrounding islands. Glass bottles are crushed and either used in construction or for making decorative furniture such as table tops.

Eco Centro also displays how food can be grown in small spaces. The Mandala Garden at Eco Centro is used to grow culinary, medicinal and insect repellent herbs and other plants that can be used in our operation. Bamboo is used as a biomass crop as it is known for retaining nutrients and absorbing atmospheric carbon. An Environmental Green Garden will grow vegetables and fish that live in the water collected from the roofs of the garden.

All photos of dried shark jaws and fins were taken in Haa Dhaal Atoll in the north of the Maldives. The finned whale shark was spotted in early May 2008 in south Ari Atoll. The photo of the finned manta ray was taken in Rasdhoo Atoll in 2007.



Soneva Fushi Takes Home Another Green Resort Award

Once again the environmental efforts of Soneva Fushi have been recognised. In February 2009, after a long assessment period, the resort was announced to be the latest winner of the President of Maldives' Green Resort

Award. General Manager Philippe Cavory proudly accepted the award on behalf of Soneva Fushi. The competition has been held annually since 1997 on initiative of the president of the island republic, directed at the tourism industry and encouraging resorts to adopt and embed green policies in their development and operation. Soneva Fushi had already won the award in 2000 and 2005.

Maldives' and Soneva Fushi's Carbon Reduction Plans

"By 2020, the Maldives will be the first country to go carbon neutral by introducing renewable energies and offsetting carbon emissions." This recent announcement by newly-elected Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed is hoped to raise environmental standards in the country - and certainly supports Soneva Fushi's long-term objective of becoming carbon neutral by 2009 and emitting zero greenhouse gases by 2010.

Rising sea levels, vanishing coral islands and the prospect of community displacements as a result of climate change continue to bring Maldives into the spotlight of international media. Efforts to slow and reverse these effects are overdue to save humankind and preserve some of the most beautiful places on Earth.

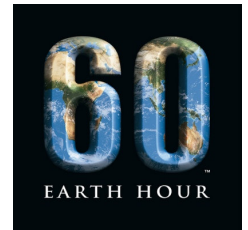
Soneva Fushi, acclaimed as a pioneer for responsibly operating the resort in harmony with the environment and social surroundings, recognises the need to take action and, since 2005, has concentrated on implementing integrated carbon reduction measures. These include energy-efficiency initiatives such as heat and pressure recovery systems, energy-saving appliances, food mile reductions, deep sea water air-conditioning, as well as a modern sewage treatment and grey water recycling plant. A carbon offsetting scheme neutralises the flight and shipping emissions of guests, hosts and purchased items through a wind energy project in southern India. Immediate plans for renewable energy include a solar parabolic system to generate electricity, heat water and desalinate seawater. The ecological footprint of Soneva Fushi is further reduced by sustainable purchasing practices, by responsibly handling most of the resort's waste in its waste-to-wealth recycling centre and by protecting its flora and fauna.

"If man can walk on the moon, we can unite to conquer our common carbon enemy," President Nasheed said in his broadcast. If Soneva Fushi can achieve carbon neutrality, so can other resorts, and so can the entire country. The Maldivian archipelago may not be saved from future submergence but the world may receive a wake-up call.

Earth Hour - Time to Switch Off

On March 28, 2009, from 20:30 to 21:30 hrs, Soneva Fushi took part in Earth Hour, the world's largest global climate change event led by the World Wildlife Fund. The resort joined hundreds of millions of concerned earth citizens and corporations in calling for action to save our planet for future generations.

While guests were encouraged to switch off their lights and take part in "dark" activities such as meditation and dinner by candlelight, night-snorkelling and star-gazing, the host area was prepared for a complete power shutdown that included the switching off of lights, fans, air-con units and TVs. Activities before during and after Earth Hour were well prepared and comprised a coconut lantern procession of about 40 employees; the host dinner buffet was set up with candlelight, acoustic guitar was played, luminous bracelets were used in the host bar later that evening, and areas were identified where energy can be saved in the future.



Environmental Books and Movies in the Resort Libraries

On top of the resort's subscription to the "Ecologist" magazine and its large stock of books and movies, critically acclaimed books and movies that cover both simple introductions and more detailed polemics on the nature of climate change and other environmental challenges are now available in Soneva Fushi's guest and host libraries. Books include Mark Lynas' "Six Degrees", Rachel Carlson's "Silent Spring" and James Lovelock's "The Revenge of Gaia", while movies cover a wide range from BBC's "Planet Earth" series to "The 11th Hour" and "Who Killed the Electric Car?". With the setting up of its own host TV channel, Soneva Fushi is now able to broadcast training materials and films with environmental background to most of its employees and to thereby increase their awareness about current local and global issues of concern.

