

## Out and about during the 'Soneva Nature Trip'

Imagine one of the most densely populated capitals in the world. Visualise the traffic on its streets, the exhaust-laden air, the colour of cement. Picture that this place is surrounded by one of the most stunning sceneries including coral reefs, sandy beaches and lush vegetation. And imagine that many of its inhabitants have never had the chance to enjoy and appreciate this beauty.

For this reason, Soneva Fushi - in collaboration with a local NGO, Eco-Care - has been organising and funding an annual environmental awareness week for about 70 school children from the Maldivian capital, Male'. Since the first 'Soneva Nature Trip' in 2000, hundreds of 10-13 year olds have been given the opportunity to learn about coral reef organisms, local plants, endangered species, good waste management practices and the threats that their unique environment faces. It is a week full of educational hands-on and fun experiences, such as snorkelling in the resort's housereef, tree-climbing, rubbish collection, separation and analysis, organic farming, nature trails and walks at night. The carefully prepared final reports submitted by the participants highlight the positive impact that the 'Soneva Nature Trip' has: The children become more familiar with the local nature and, at the same time, more aware of environmental problems that need to be solved with their help.

This innovative approach to environmental education led to the 'Soneva Nature Trip' being awarded the President of Maldives' Green Leaf Award in 2003. The 9<sup>th</sup> Nature Trip took place in mid-April 2007 and was as successful as in the previous years.



## Tree-planting on Eydhafushi

On 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2007, Soneva Fushi implemented a tree-planting campaign in conjunction with the residents of our neighbouring island Eydhafushi, as part of our resort's social responsibility programme. A group of hosts gifted 300 saplings of different herbs and fruit trees as well as planting tools to the staff and students of the island high school. Highly motivated to transform Baa Atoll's well developed yet hot capital island into a greener and shadier place, the students welcomed the saplings with open arms and planted them in their own back gardens, where they promised to take care of them.

We were also delighted to welcome two socially-conscious guests, Mr. Miles and Mrs. Khoury-Miles, to this tree-planting campaign, who during the trip not only assisted with the digging and planting, but also showed great interest in the lives of the Maldivian people. They were keen to maintain their support for Soneva Fushi's social responsibility programme and have pledged a yearly donation towards assisting and developing children's education in our area. A part of this donation will include supporting and implementing environmental educational programmes for the next five years, beginning April 2007.





### Environmental Education with Live & Learn

In early 2007, Soneva Fushi resort approached the international NGO Live & Learn Environmental Education about a potential long-term collaboration to increase environmental awareness amongst the resort's hosts and local communities in Baa Atoll. By that time, Live & Learn had already been established in the Maldives for one year and had published several brochures, which are now widely used by schools and island committees for targeting social and environmental challenges.

Four members of the Live & Learn team visited Soneva Fushi and two neighbouring local islands, Eydhafushi and Dhonfanu, in mid-April and started its awareness training project with a Rapid Assessment of Perceptions (RAP). It is Live & Learn's firm believe that a RAP is a key tool to better understand the local context and the perceptions of the local audience on environmental issues. The community members' sense of ownership is thereby increased, and key issues can be better targeted. Main concerns of the Soneva Fushi hosts included waste management issues at the resort as well as on neighbouring islands, beach erosion and fossil-fuel consumption.

As an initial project of Live & Learn's long-term awareness training, alternative waste disposal strategies were analysed and put into practice in workshops that were carried out on all three islands and involved numerous hosts and community members. Compost heaps were created, waste items were separated, and ways to reduce rubbish on the islands were sought. Future projects planned by Soneva Fushi and Live & Learn will revolve around climate change, nature preservation, health and sanitation as well as more waste management issues.



### Coconut power an option for Soneva Fushi?

In 2007 we set out to investigate the feasibility of using biodiesel as a fuel for power generation and transportation at Soneva Fushi. We began by evaluating projects in Thailand, Sri Lanka and several Pacific Island States where biodiesel production has increased significantly in recent years.



The idea is to extract oil from coconuts which is then converted to biodiesel. Excess coconut oil would be used for spa products such as massage oil and candles. Producing soap from glycerine, the by-product of esterification (the chemical reaction where oil is converted to biodiesel) is also an option. Other sources of oil are waste cooking oil and seeds and nuts from plants such as jatropha and sunflower.

The main reasons for considering biodiesel production at Soneva Fushi are that it:

- is produced from renewable resources and results in far less carbon emissions than petro-diesel. In certain cases biofuel use is close to being carbon neutral. This is because the carbon emitted during combustion is the carbon that was absorbed during plant growth.
- increases energy security (and improves balance of payments) by reducing dependence on and the costs of imported fuel and the risks associated with fluctuations in the price of diesel.
- would lead to increased local employment and be a boost to the local economy.

If successful at Soneva Fushi, biodiesel production could be encouraged across the Maldives, a country in which energy costs are relatively high in relation to income levels and one in which coconuts are in plentiful supply. Biodiesel can be manufactured on a small scale; therefore, sufficient quantities could be produced for electricity and machinery for small island communities.

### Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

We are attempting to reuse items that had previously been regarded as waste and divert as many materials away from landfill as possible through reuse. For example, wooden shipping crates covered in coconut branches make great planters for herbs. We have also been using cooking oil containers covered in cadjan as well as plastic water bottles, yoghurt pots and metal tins as plant pots. These are placed in host accommodation areas where spices, fruit trees and flowers can be cultivated. We are currently also improving the compost system to make our own fertiliser and to incorporate as much biodegradable material, such as food waste, paper, card and sawdust, as possible.