

Being Part of the Community

An Interview with Armando Kraenzlin,
Regional Vice President and General Manager,
Four Seasons Resorts Maldives



Four Seasons private island in the Maldives (left); two-bedroom water suite at the Four Seasons Landaa Giraavaru (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Armando Kraenzlin began his Four Seasons career as an Executive Assistant Manager with Four Seasons Hotel Jakarta. He has since held various senior management roles with the company in Mumbai and its two Maldivian resorts of Kuda Huraa and Landaa Giraavaru, as well as regional roles encompassing Bali, Vietnam, and Langkawi. He is Swiss-born and a hotel management graduate from the Lausanne Hotel School, Switzerland.



Armando Kraenzlin

PROPERTY BRIEF Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru (fourseasons.com/maldiveslg) is a 44-acre, 103-villa wonderland in the Baa Atoll UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. A haven of innovation, wellbeing, and conservation, highlights include a multi award-winning Spa & Ayurvedic Retreat that combines medically accredited therapies with ancient holistic sciences; an interactive Marine Discovery Centre with a Turtle Rehabilitation Clinic; seven food and/or beverage outlets, including Italian, Arabian, and Asian, all with Ayurvedic options; and complimentary services and amenities ranging from orientation dives, kayaking, windsurfing, and catamaran sailing to Landaa Spring Water, coral reef-scaping experiences, and a Dosha-determining consultation with an Ayurvedic Physician.

Would you provide an overview of each of the properties you oversee?

My home turf is the Maldives, where we have four properties in total. There are two island resorts – the first opened in 1998 and the second in 2006 – linked by cruises on the country's luxurious *Four Seasons Explorer*. We also recently opened Four Seasons first exclusive-use private island in late 2016.

Four Seasons was the first international hotel management company to enter the Maldives, and the properties maintain a strong leadership position.

We remain relevant after 20 years because we have continued to evolve and are constantly investing in new projects that benefit the local environment and community.

I also oversee the Four Seasons Resorts in Bali – two complementary properties that are consistently rated among the best in the world; one on the beach at Jimbaran Bay and one in the cultural heartland of Sayan.

In addition, I oversee The Nam Hai in Vietnam, a very recent addition to the Four Seasons portfolio in December last year. It was and continues to be the leading hotel in Vietnam.

What efforts have you undertaken in regard to conservation and sustainability?

I've spent the majority of my career in Southeast Asia and, in each place I have worked, it has always been about being part of the local community, in whatever form that may take.

I arrived in the Maldives in 2000, hot on the heels of a devastating El Niño event that affected vast areas of coral reef. We reached out to a local marine conservation agency, Seamarc, to formulate a plan to help restore the local reefs and build an education platform to share with guests.

It all started in the hope that with a little support, nature could rejuvenate herself, but it developed over the next 16 years into one of the world's most successful coral reef propagation projects. Between our two resort islands, we had transplanted over 5,000 structures that were an integral part of the reef until last year, when another devastating El Niño event occurred. The project suffered a huge setback, but we have a much stronger resolve these days, so we continue to push forward more determined than ever while using the opportunity to increase awareness among guests.

Over the past 15 years, we have built a strong on-site team of some 15 marine scientists, including international professors, lecturers, and Ph.D. students, running all sorts of diverse conservation and research projects. We are also closely aligned with The Manta Trust, the world's leading manta ray research organization, which started its life years ago at Landaa Giraavaru. We also play a significant role supporting Olive Ridley turtles, which aren't indigenous to the Maldives. They live in the open ocean and often get entangled in discarded fishing nets, causing severe injuries. We opened a clinic to help those found in the Maldives and now receive injured turtles from all over the country, many of which can be released after a few months of care. For those we can't release, we set up a 'Flying Turtles' project in cooperation with aquariums in Belgium and the Netherlands to provide lifelong homes.

We are also looking at an aquarium fish production facility. We are raising Clown Fish

and working on a system to set up a new livelihood for local fishermen, to take the pressure off the natural reef by creating private, cottage industry-type aquariums.

There is a lot of interest worldwide in conservation, and we showcase all of our projects in a large interactive Marine Discovery Centre where guests can expand their knowledge and get involved firsthand.

Our projects are not just linked to conservation; we also run a very successful apprenticeship program that has been supporting the community since 2001 by training local youngsters to become meaningful members of the hospitality industry. Next year's intake will mark the program's 500th graduate, which is a great milestone.

How tied into the business are those efforts?

All these efforts were started because they were the right thing to do, but it also makes clear business sense to invest in projects that protect and preserve a place as fragile as the Maldives and that provide sustainable employment for local people.

What emphasis have you placed on wellness?

Four Seasons was the first hotel company to open a spa in the Maldives – The Island Spa at Kuda Huraa. When we started working on the second property, we decided we needed to introduce a complementary concept so that the spas could stand apart. We were inspired by nearby Kerala, the birthplace of Ayurveda, and embraced it the way it's done in India. We're now a government-recognized clinic, and we take it very seriously. We have three dedicated Ayurvedic doctors and an Ayurvedic pharmacy that has just gone online. We have yoga in place in a big way and we are working on a yoga teacher certification course for Four Seasons yogis in cooperation with a yoga institute in Bangalore.

Ayurveda forms the backbone of our natural wellness offering, and the fact that guests can try it with Four Seasons service levels really widens its appeal. Some couples visit where one follows an Ayurvedic program and the other enjoys a more conventional beach vacation with water sports, dolphin cruises, and diving. Ayurveda is just one way that we encourage people to take a holistic approach to their health and happiness. And let's face it, if you can't be happy in the Maldives, where can you? ●