

The Maldives: Not Just for Tourists But Learners

One of our five trips around the world (1997-2001) included a brief stop in the Maldives. The Maldivian who gave our port talk had “little, really, to tell.” “Our history,” she sighed, “is just a few ruins.” Presumably she meant the earliest history, for, actually, the Buddhist, Islamic, Colonial (Portuguese, Dutch, British) Periods are known; the Republic came in 1968 and the current Constitution in 2008. She took a scant four minutes to “chat us up” before, gladly it seemed, turning us over to the video from The Maldives Tourist Board.

What we heard was that every piece of the Maldives is an island, complete unto itself. Hulule Island was the airport; other islands were “hotels.” The prison was an island. Gan Island was a Royal Air Force Base. Bandos Island at least had the finest marine life in the world! Very important was the fact that, if we wanted to own an island, here in the Maldives was still the place to do so. “But hurry, please, you’re late!” The developers were racing since, not The Ugly Americans, but a European flew over these gems of the Indian Ocean and “discovered” them. The Maldives, one of the smallest countries, now boasted the best snorkeling and remained independent after the British protectorate ceased. Still, because it was all Muslim, not just drugs were banned but dogs, pork, and alcohol. (I could not forbear whispering to my husband that “The dogs are at least ‘food for thought!’”)

The lady went on, sighing often. “The soil is too saline.” (She did not boast of the freedom from fertilizer.) “We eat fish, bananas, coconuts, and yams. Anything

else is imported. We eat fish at every meal.” Then came a sudden smile and “Our people are all mixed!” She did not speak of the flying fish and dainty dolphin; the dhoni boats of coconut wood; the canopies of bougainvillea; the nineteen atolls that surely “made Darwin commit self-correction,” as I would have presented that case, and “the endless island shapes—green, green gems on blue, blue sea.” Nor did she point out that the language, Divehi, traces back to Indo-Aryan, while atoll derives from Divehi atolu, with Huvadhu the largest known atoll anywhere.

Most of us know about the 2004 tsunami that hit the Maldives, if not about how much we can now learn from an island(s) country with dry and rainy seasons, rising sea levels that threaten to devour it, and problems with, for example, waste disposal and reef “bleaching.” It also offers more insight into unrest centering on human rights issues, for non-Muslims cannot receive citizenship.

Our second lecturer (this one on world economics) was fetched in a motor launch and let us know that he was actually there to tell the Maldivian government how to take stock of itself. Two pieces of advice he would give. (Would the Maldivians know it was secondhand?) 1) The Maldives must put in gambling. (He neglected to say how many islands should be designated casinos. I wanted him at least to “place a bet.” The archipelago then had nearly 1,200, with only 200 inhabited.) 2) “You must adopt offshore banking,” the economist insisted he would tell them. (Because they are a few feet above sea level and have a monsoon season?) The economist did not give us reasons, just

shared his grand ideas.

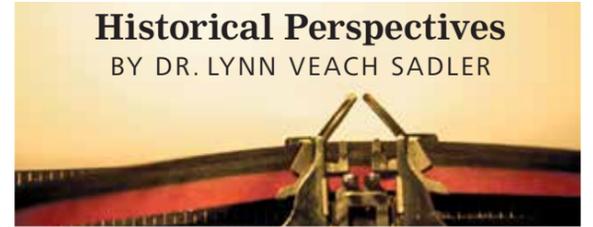
We visited Male, the capital-island of the Maldives (and a “capital” island, too). Oddly, the Maldivian people (called Dhivehin) did not swarm us; we swarmed them. They did post boys at the doors of their stores to bid all of us to enter. The most crowded shop promised “paradise within.” But in Male, proprietors shook our hands and thanked us for “visiting my shop,” even when we did not buy.

The Maldivian “Folkloric Show” came to our ship. The two women in the troupe tittered and talked to each other behind their hands. The men wore Westernized shirts over wrap-around skirts—petticoat *lungis*—and danced provocatively, one with a waving handkerchief. A drummer worked so at his art that he earned a bloody hand. Another, in the midst of the turbans, wore a baseball hat. In the story of the woman who went to the well and had adventures, the woman was absent. The frenzied men she apparently met danced in the aisles of the ship’s theater and rolled their eyes back in their heads. I thought the Maldivians were deviously having us on, but the result was quite delightful.

My husband and I were the only visitors to the National Museum, located in the Sultan’s Park. It had a tin roof, tiny rafters, and narrow stairs of doubtless imported wood that looked like mahogany. A wizened old man was the guardian and dogged our every step, an annoyance of the greatest proportions until we paused and he took the chance to point proudly and tell us in Divehi [with ample gestures of hands, face especially, and

Historical Perspectives

BY DR. LYNN VEACH SADLER



certain other body parts] to lift the lid from the wooden bowl that sheltered the Sultan’s plate and service. He chattered gently in Divehi and kept straining to make us understand—and made us so want to. He carefully pulled open every tiny drawer of a royal jewelry box. I hoped it belonged to Sultana Khadeeja, who was twice deposed by a husband but each time regained her throne. Every place or country that loves itself and its history needs tellers with such ardor. To us, he far surpassed the local guide, the tourist video, and the sophisticated economics professor.

My later research gave me the wonderful Maldivian tale of the Arab Holy Man who bested the evil jinni with verses from the Koran, saved the maidens from sacrifice, and converted the land to Islam. At the tomb of Abul Barakaath Al Yoosuf Al Barbary, I hoped for and imagined his spirit rising to make the Maldivians more history and remind them to revere what they had. He could—and should—appear in the guise of the old guide in the National Museum.

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12th Annual Pepper Festival Sunday, Sept. 22, 2019, 3–6 pm

Pepper Fest is a celebration of sustainable agriculture, local farmers, and the creativity of the Piedmont’s top chefs, brewers and artisans.

Downtown Pittsboro streets will close to host around 3000 folks who enjoy live music and revelry, learning and discovery—including a kid’s craft and fun zone—while filling up on delicious pepper-themed dishes made with delicious, locally grown sweet, hot and smoky NC peppers.

Pepper Fest chefs get super creative with their dishes, making everything from pepper ice cream to savory dishes and salsas, pepper gumbos and chili. Abundance NC supplies them with peppers from local NC farmers, supporting our local food shed. You’ll want to taste everything!

Chefs compete for awards. Foodies taste different dishes made from peppers grown in the Piedmont of North Carolina. Children run wild, folks dance, and laugh. A Pepper Queen and King are crowned, local businesses and non profits share their news and we all go home very happy.

Throughout the day, you can purchase (cash bar) all types of microbrews in which some of the brewers have added peppers to their ales! There’s also local winery and spirits, local soda and coffee to choose from.

On top of that, there’s amazing local music and a kid zone so children have a blast while parents relax. There are BEST DISH AWARDS and BEST BEER AWARDS.

This year’s headliner is 8-Track Minds, NC’s finest 70’s dance party band to go along with the sweet and hot!

Creativity is on display everywhere at Pepper Fest. From the scrumptious concoctions dreamed up by our chefs and brewers, to the sweet melodies humming down from the bands on stage, to the complex flavors embedded in the peppers themselves, there’s a lot to make us proud to be from N.C.

This year, Abundance is collaborating with Triad Electric Vehicle Associate and Chatham County Climate Change Advisory Committee to bring models of electric vehicles for the public to learn and see, chat with experienced owners about tax benefits, logistics, challenges and benefits of Electric cars. Come visit!



Visit www.PepperFestNC.org for tickets, participants, and more info!