



GRAND PARK
— KODHIPPARU —
MALDIVES

CONNECT
WITH
Nature

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A NOTE FROM GRACE

GRACE YANEZ

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There's a particular quality to July light underwater — thinner, more diffuse, carrying more life suspended in the water than usual. I spent most of the month in it, mask fogging, notebook barely legible by the time I reach shore. This issue is less a record of what we observed and more an invitation into what you can experience alongside me: new coral fragments taking hold, a father and daughter's first snorkel, a jellyfish bloom that came and went within days, and one encounter at the jetty I'm still thinking about. Every story here ends with an invitation — that's really the point.

If you're staying with us, I'd love to have you along — whether that's a sunrise guided snorkel, an evening Reef Talk over dinner, or just a walk down to the jetty to see what's passing through. Come find me. I'm usually somewhere near the water.



FIND ME AT THE REEF



Guided Reef Snorkel -

a morning introduction to the house reef with species identification and ecological context. Suitable for all levels, including non-swimmers with a float board.



Marine Biology Dive -

for certified divers, an immersive exploration of the reef drop-off with live commentary, species surveys, and biodiversity documentation.



Reef Talk -

an afternoon session at the Beach Club, where Grace shares the month's most significant sightings, reef health updates, and what to look for next.

JULY HIGHLIGHTS

July began with new materials for our Coral Research Laboratory — the first shipment letting us study coral properly on-site, alongside supplies to expand the reef frames. I spent several mornings out there with the team, clearing failed fragments and making space for new cuttings. Every time, an audience gathered: butterflyfish, wrasses, triggerfish, juvenile snappers, as curious about the disturbance as any guest on the jetty above. A reef under restoration is never empty — it's simply waiting to be filled again.

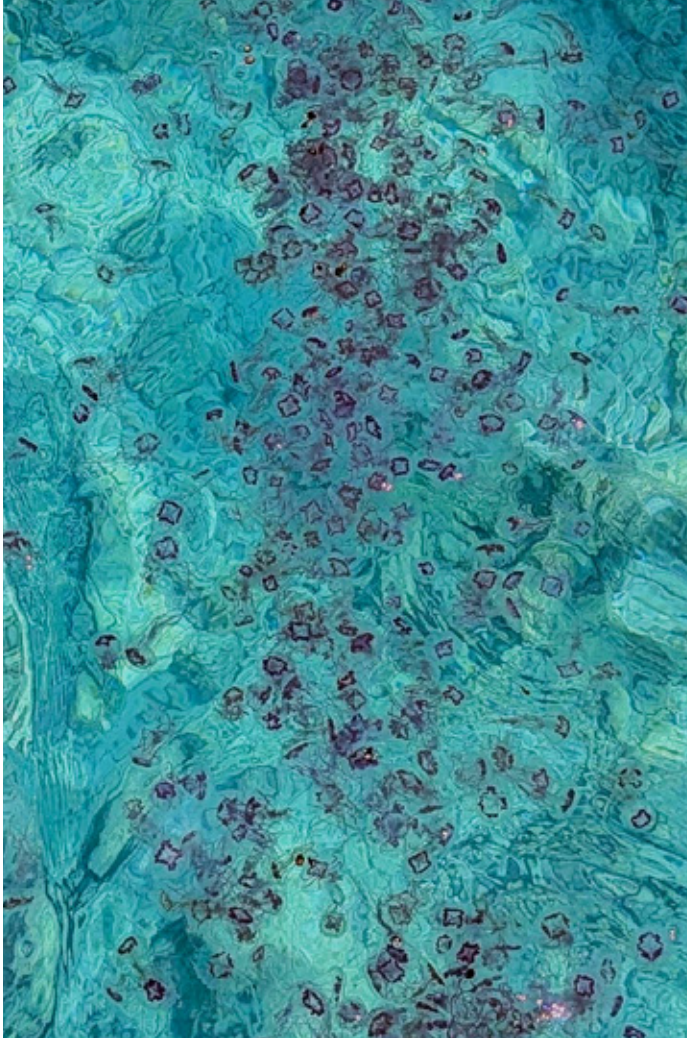


More than forty-five guests joined me in the water this month, many meeting the lagoon for the first time. One morning stays with me: a father and daughter, her first snorkel ever, nervous going in. Within minutes, a baby reef shark slid beneath us and an eagle ray passed overhead — and that nervousness turned to wonder. Neither wanted to get out. It's rarely the rarest sighting that changes someone's relationship with the ocean.

For Shark Awareness Day, we tried something different — dinner at Breeze devoted entirely to sharks. Over the table, I talked through their role as apex predators and why finding one on a reef is good news, not something to brace for. Guests left knowing a little more, and worrying a little less.



NOTABLE SIGHTINGS



MAUVE STINGER JELLYFISH

Pelagia noctiluca

For two and a half days from 11 July, a bloom of mauve stinger jellyfish drifted close to shore, and we raised the purple flag as a precaution — a genuinely painful sting. Mauve stingers drift with the current rather than swim with purpose, feeding turtles and reef fish in turn. Their brief appearance wasn't an intrusion; it was a glimpse of a larger cycle passing through.

Join me on a guided snorkel this season and ask me about the frames, the flags, or anything drifting past that morning — I'll have a story for it.



DID YOU KNOW



Stinging All Over

Its stinging cells are found not only on the tentacles, but also across the bell—so no part should be touched.



A Natural Night-Light

When disturbed, the mauve stinger can flash with bioluminescence and even leave a glowing trail of mucus behind.



Small but Predatory

It feeds on zooplankton, including small crustaceans, fish eggs and fish larvae.

MEET THE REEF

AMBERFISH SEA CUCUMBER

(Thelenota anax), approx. 75cm

Where: Near Kahchala

When: Mid-July, during a guided snorkel excursion



One of the best finds this month came during a routine snorkel — proof that patience beats planning. Resting on the seabed near Kahchala was an amberfish sea cucumber (*Thelenota anax*), close to 75cm long. It was once abundant across Maldivian waters, but decades of collection — dried, processed and exported as a delicacy across parts of Asia — drove fish populations down faster than they could recover, making sightings like this increasingly rare. Sea cucumbers do unglamorous but essential work on the reef floor,

recycling nutrients and keeping the substrate healthy — finding one this size told me this reef still has something rare left to give.

Join me on a guided snorkel and there's a good chance we'll go looking for the reef floor's quieter residents together — the ones most people swim straight past.



MY FAVOURITE ENCOUNTER

ORNATE EAGLE RAY

(Aetomylaeus vespertilio)

Where: Near the main jetty

When: Mid-July

If I had to choose one encounter to remember July by, it's this one. An Ornate Eagle Ray (*Aetomylaeus vespertilio*) passed close to the jetty — unmistakable, with rings and spots so intricate it looks hand-painted, and that distinctive duck-bill snout. Some marine biologists go years without seeing one; the species is Endangered, with wild populations small and fragmented, which is exactly why this felt like a genuine privilege.

Watching something this rare move calmly through shallow water, unbothered by an audience it has no reason to trust, is quietly humbling. Whatever brought it so close this month, I'm taking it as a good sign.

Come to one of my Reef Talks this week and I'll show you the photos — and if you're lucky, we might spot one together on our next guided snorkel.



THE REEF IN JULY

Slow Water, Full Reef

A quick word on visibility, since I'm asked about it constantly this time of year. Between July and the months that follow, our house reef loses some clarity, and most guests assume that means less life below the surface. It's almost the opposite — lower visibility usually means more plankton, more food, drifting through. This month, reef fish aggregations grew noticeably larger and denser than usual, as large groups fed and sheltered together over the coral. Cloudier water can be exactly the sign of a reef doing what it should.



There's a lesson in that I try to carry off the reef too — that clarity isn't always the measure of what's working, and slowing down to look properly tells you more than a clear view from a distance ever could. One snorkel this month made the case better than words: in about three minutes, without moving far, two sharks passed beneath us, then two eagle rays, a turtle, and a small group of squid drifting past in near silence. No guide arranges an encounter like that. The reef simply offers it, unprompted, to whoever happens to be there.

If unhurried time in the water is what you're after — a genuine reset rather than a checklist of sightings — come find me for an early morning or late afternoon guided swim. Some of the best moments happen when we're not looking for anything in particular

WHAT WE'RE WATCHING NOW



August tends to carry July's rhythm forward — warmer surface water, reef fish still gathering, and, if we're lucky, a few more surprises from open water. I'll be back at the frames most mornings, and back at the jetty most evenings, hoping for another encounter worth writing home about.

If you're visiting this month, come find me for a guided snorkel or the next Reef Talk — I'd love to show you what August is doing beneath the surface.





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Until next month...

the reef keeps its own rhythm —
happening whether we're watching or not.

Discover our house reef >