

# \* LHAVIYANI \* TURTLE FEST

2025 Annual Report




JOINTLY ORGANISED BY





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## FOREWARD

Sea turtles have gracefully roamed our oceans for millions of years, but today, they are increasingly under threat, mostly due to human activity. Sea turtles are wild animals that belong in the ocean, yet here in the Maldives and around the world, they are still hunted for their meat and are taken illegally as hatchlings to be kept as pets. Since 2015, Atoll Marine Conservation Centre have received 307 sea turtle hatchlings, with 243 of them surrendered from the illegal pet trade. These baby turtles were taken from their nests, kept in unsuitable conditions, often fed the wrong diets, and handled in ways that lead to long-term health complications.

It's estimated that only 1 in 1,000 sea turtle hatchlings naturally survive to adulthood, which makes every sea turtle hatchling significant. By taking hatchlings and keeping them as pets, their chance of survival is reduced even further, causing harm to the animal and preventing normal sea turtle behaviour. During the first half of 2025 alone, AMC received three hatchlings from the illegal pet trade, highlighting that this problem still prevails in 2025, reinforcing the need for ongoing outreach and education to continually raise awareness and prevent this from happening.



*Above: Critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle. Image taken by AMC staff.*

Unfortunately, the threats to sea turtles don't end there—humans endanger them at every stage of life through plastic ingestion, boat strikes, coastal development, and habitat loss, along with the long-term impact of climate change.

One of the most common threats that Atoll Marine Conservation Centre encounters is entanglement in marine debris, particularly ghost gear. Ghost gear is lost or purposely abandoned fishing gear that drifts through Maldivian waters, often trapping marine life with it. Most of the turtle patients receiving care at AMC are olive ridley sea turtles that were once victims of ghost gear entanglement and suffer severe injuries such as the loss of their flippers, potentially life-threatening infections, or buoyancy issues that prevent the turtles from diving below the surface. Awareness of these threats and their consequences is often lacking, which is why awareness-raising initiatives are so important—and why turtle festivals are a powerful tool for conservation.

Turtle festivals are celebrated around the world, from India's Velas Turtle Festival to Costa Rica's Tortuguero Festival. They serve as vibrant, community-led events that offer a dynamic platform to educate people about turtle biology, the threats they face, and the importance of protecting their ocean home.

Local NGOs, government institutions, community members, and other stakeholders play a vital role in bringing these events to life, uniting people for a shared commitment to protecting the underwater world. By blending creativity, culture, and hands-on learning, these festivals inspire action, foster a sense of ocean stewardship, and make conservation inclusive, engaging and memorable for all ages.



The Lhaviyani Turtle Festival is held annually on the island of Naifaru, the capital of Lhaviyani Atoll, to raise awareness about sea turtle conservation and broader ocean conservation topics. It is the only event of its kind here in the Maldives.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

### EDUCATE

The community about the importance of marine life.

### IGNITE

Passion for the marine environment and promote a healthy balance between culture and sustainability.

### ENGAGE

Our audience through fun and interesting activities and entertainment.

### PROPOSE

Partnerships and environmentally responsible solutions.

You can learn more about the aims and objectives of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival in our Turtle Festival awareness video which was screened during the 2025 turtle festival at the main stage, and is available to watch on our YouTube Channel via this [link](#).



Above: School stall decorations for Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025





### 3. PREVIOUS YEARS

In 2016, the first edition of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival was held by Naifaru Juvenile and ever since, the event has been a great success, gaining momentum with every passing year.

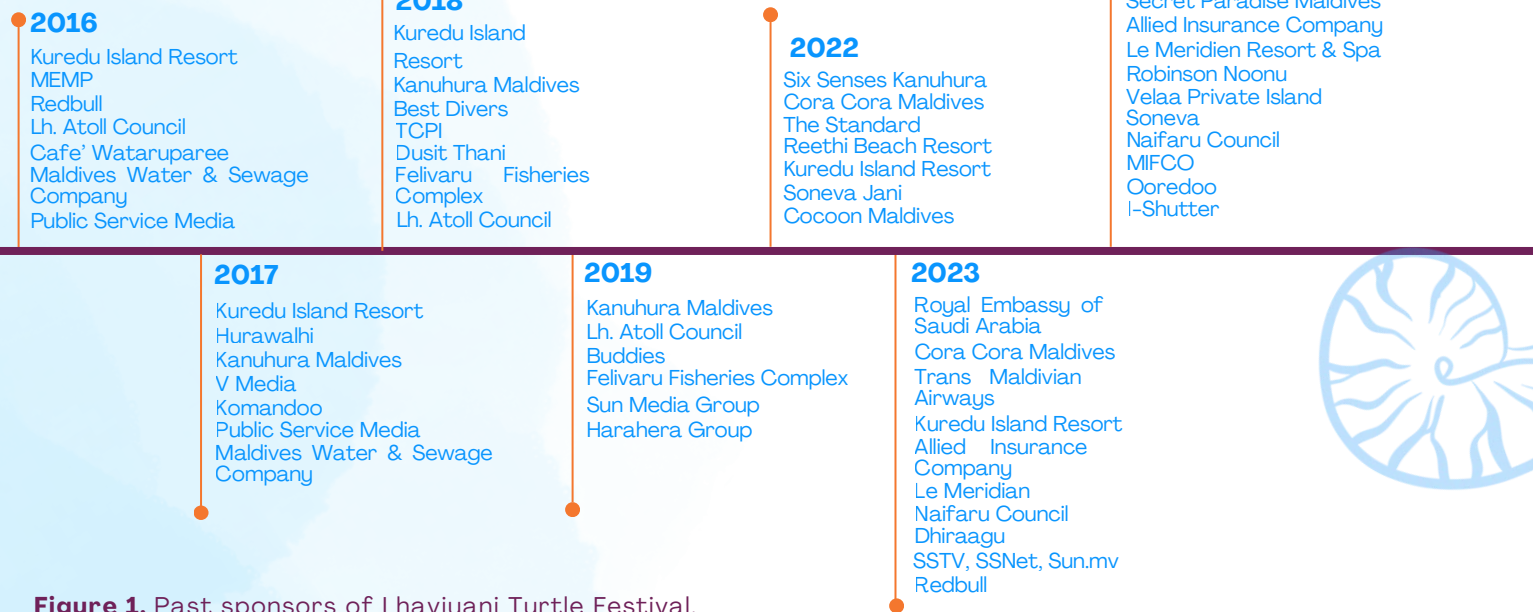
Many different organizations have been involved over the years (Table 1) who set up stalls, donated money and/ or materials (Figure 1) or simply just visited the event from various atolls. With each new edition of the festival, we welcome more NGO participants, sponsors, and schools.

#### PAST ATTENDEES

**Table 1.** Previous attendees at Lhaviyani Turtle Festival.

Organizations	2016	2017	2018	2019	2022	2023	2024
United Nations Development Program – Global Environmental Fund and Small Grant Program	●						
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	●	●	●	●	●		
Marine Research Centre	●		●				
Maldives Environmental Management Project	●						
International Union for Conservation and Nature	●						
Naifaru Police			●				
Eco Youth			●	●			
Lhaviyani Hopsital			●				
Save the Beach	●	●	●				
All Lhaviyani Schools	●	●	●		●		
Pro Divers	●	●	●	●			●
Maldives Police Service		●	●				
Manta Trust		●	●	●	●	●	●
Marine Savers/ Reefscapers		●	●	●	●	●	●
Olive Ridley Project		●	●	●	●	●	●
Soneva Jani					●		●
CLEAN Maldives					●	●	●
Coral Mission					●		●
Veshisaafu						●	
Maldives Whale Shark Research Program						●	●
The Vibe						●	
Captain Fanplastic						●	
Noo Raajje						●	
Ministry of Climate Change, Environment, and Energy						●	●
SMLA Life						●	
Naifaru Council						●	
Naifaru Scuba Center						●	
Zero Waste Maldives						●	
Addu Nature Park						●	●
Small Island Geographic Society							●
Velaa Private Island							●
Miyaru Programme							●
Six Senses Kanuhura							●
Secretariat of the Faadhippolhu Atoll Council							●
Secret Paradise Maldives							●

## PAST SPONSORSHIP



**Figure 1.** Past sponsors of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival.

When we look back at photos from the very first Lhaviyani Turtle Festival in 2016, we are filled with pride at how much the event has grown and evolved over the years. What began as a modest initiative to bring awareness to marine conservation, has blossomed into one of the largest and most anticipated environmental awareness events in the Maldives.

Each year, the festival has seen increased participation, innovative activities and greater outreach, reflecting the growing commitment of our community, schools, and organizations to protect our oceans. From humble beginnings to the vibrant celebration it is today, the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival has become a cornerstone initiative of marine conservation efforts in the Maldives.

## 2016



Above (Left to Right): Sand sculpture; main stage; stalls; awards ceremony.

## 2017



Above (Left to Right): Dance performances; stalls; entrance archway; waste sculpture entries.



## 2018



Above (Left to Right): Main stage; cultural dance performance; stalls.

## 2019



Above (Left to Right): Stalls; recycled dress making competition; festival ground; entrance archway.

## 2022



Above (Left to Right): Stalls; sand sculpture competition.

## 2023



Above (Left to Right): Festival entrance archway; 1st Atoll Marine Symposium; festival stalls; waste sculpture.

## 2024



Above (Left to Right): Festival entrance archway; 1st Atoll Marine Symposium; sand sculpture competition, waste sculpture.



SIX SENSES  
KANUHURA

# \* LHAVIYANI \* TURTLE FEST 2025





## 1. SUMMARY

The Six Senses Kanuhura Lhaviyani Turtle Festival, organised and hosted by Naifaru Juvenile and Atoll Marine Conservation Centre (AMC), was held on the 5th and 6th September, marking its 8th edition!

Drawing over 3,000 attendees and 20+ organizations, the festival united the community to raise awareness about marine conservation, both in the Maldives, and beyond.

## 2. LOCAL VOLUNTEERS

Each year, the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival not only aims to educate and engage the community—it also strives to actively involve them in bringing the event to life. In the weeks leading up to the festival, Naifaru Juvenile opened up a call for local volunteers, inviting youth from Naifaru and surrounding islands to join the festival workforce and contribute to its planning and delivery.

Local volunteers are truly instrumental to the festival's success. From promoting competitions within their communities, assisting with decorations, supporting logistics and the set-up of stalls, to welcoming and guiding schools upon arrival, their efforts ensure that the festival runs smoothly from start to finish.



Above: Local volunteers and AMC staff listening to a festival briefing.

In 2025, a total of 20 local volunteers dedicated their time and energy to the event—a contribution we deeply appreciate. Their involvement not only strengthens the festival's operations but also reflects the strong local support behind the event. It is encouraging to see young people stepping forward to volunteer for a cause that benefits both their community and the environment, and we hope to see even greater youth engagement in future years.

## 3. ARTWORK & BRANDING

This turtle festival's branding was created by one of AMC's former resort-based Marine Biologists Rafha, who also designed the new turtle festival logo, which will be used as the symbol for all future turtle festival's going forwards (Figure 2).

This is the second year that Rafha has designed the festival artwork, and the branding was used for all festival materials, including the festival t-shirts, posters, banners, schedules, and even this report! These contributions are so valuable to us as it elevates the event's professionalism while also helping to distinguish the event from one year to the next.



**Figure 2.** Official Lhaviyani Turtle Festival logo, designed by AMC's former resort Marine Biologist, Mariyam Rafha Abdulla.



## ENTRANCE ARCHWAY

The entrance archway has long been a defining visual feature of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival, and in 2025 it carried an even greater symbolic meaning. Embracing this year's emphasis on strengthening the connection between communities and conservation, the archway was collaboratively crafted by local youth, community members, and our dedicated team of volunteers.

Beyond marking the gateway to the festival grounds, the archway served as an iconic photo backdrop for attendees. Its presence across social media helped boost the festival's visibility and further highlighted the power of community-led creativity in promoting environmental stewardship.



*Above and below: Local volunteers, community members and children helping decorate the 2025 festival entrance archway. Images taken by AMC.*



*Above: Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025 entrance archway, created by local volunteers, and the community. Image taken by Elsa Stocking.*



## 4. PARTICIPANTS

### SCHOOLS

We were thrilled to welcome a new record of 13 schools from 7 different atolls to the 2025 Lhaviyani Turtle Festival—our highest school participation to date, and three more than last year's total of 10 schools!

Among them were three schools from Lhaviyani itself, alongside visiting schools from neighbouring atolls including three from Raa, two from Baa, and two from Noonu. Several of these were first-time participants, including B. Atoll School, Inguraidhoo School, and Meyna School.

Additionally, we were extremely excited to welcome Imaduddin School from Malé for the very first time, along with newcomers from further afield such as Himandhoo School in Alifu Alifu Atoll and Afeefuddin School in Haa Dhaalu Atoll.

This marks the first time that schools from both Alifu Alifu and Haa Dhaalu have been represented at this event. This is a huge milestone for us, as students are truly at the heart of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival. Expanding their involvement helps us achieve our core aim of inspiring and engaging as many young people as possible with regard to marine conservation.

#### Lhaviyani Atoll



Madhrasathul  
Ifthithaah



Lh. Atoll Education  
Centre



Lh. Atoll School

#### Baa Atoll



B. Atoll School



B. Atoll Education  
Centre

#### Raa Atoll



Dhuvaaafaru  
Primary School



Hulhudhuffaar  
School



Inguraidhoo  
School

#### Noonu Atoll



Kudafaree  
School



Meyna School

#### Male



Imaduddin  
School

#### Alifu Alifu Atoll



Himandhoo  
School

#### Haa Dhaalu Atoll

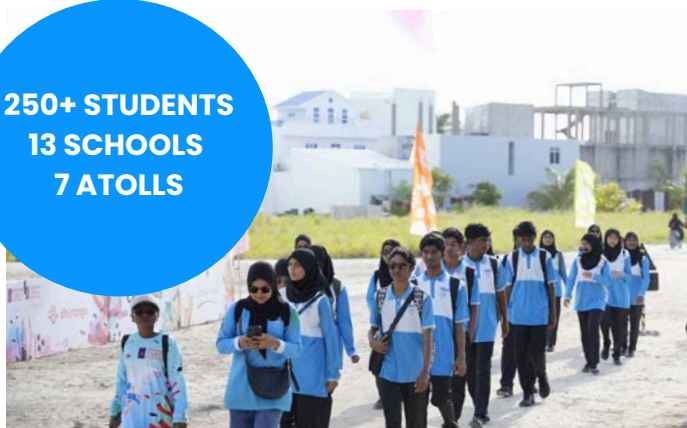


Afeefuddin  
School

Above: Schools participating in the Six Senses Kanuhura Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025.

Each school brought approximately 20 students and 5 officials, meaning more than 250 students were actively engaged in the festival activities.

**250+ STUDENTS**  
**13 SCHOOLS**  
**7 ATOLLS**



*Above: Lh. Atoll School students arriving to the festival.*

Alongside the return of seven schools from the 2024 event, 2025 saw the participation of six new schools—a milestone made possible thanks to the generous support of partner resorts. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to MIFCO Felivaru Fisheries Complex for arranging the transport of Lh. Atoll Education Center (Hinnavaru); Six Senses Kanuhura for arranging transport for Lh. Atoll School (Kurendhoo); Dusit Thani Maldives for transporting B. Atoll School (Dharavandhoo); Soneva Fushi for covering the transport costs of B. Atoll Education Center (Eydhafushi); Robinson Noonu for transporting Kudafaree School (Table 6).

The students took part in a wide range of exciting competitions designed to spark critical thinking about sustainability and encourage research into marine conservation topics.

They also hosted their own marine awareness stalls, showcased alongside those of local NGOs, government bodies, and other conservation stakeholders. This integration gave students the opportunity to connect with experts and leaders in the field while proudly sharing their knowledge of the ocean and marine wildlife.

We hope the 2025 festival inspired students to explore the possibilities within the field of marine conservation in the Maldives and motivated them to take part in shaping a more sustainable future.

Our aim is for these interactions not only to strengthen awareness but also to ignite a lifelong passion for protecting the ocean. We hope every student leaves the festival with a sense of responsibility for the future of the Maldives' environmental heritage, and the inspiration to make a difference.



*Above: Dhuvaafaru Primary School students arriving to Lhaviyani Turtle Festival through the entrance archway. Photo taken by Dhuvaafaru Primary School teacher.*



## NGO'S AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The 2025 Six Senses Kanuhura Lhaviyani Turtle Festival welcomed active participation from 21 different organizations including 11 non-profit organisations, six tourism operators including five resorts, three government institutions, and one dive centre.

Whether it be through presenting or joining a panel discussion at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium, holding a marine awareness stall at the festival, or raising awareness for sea turtles and building excitement around the event, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all the organisations involved for making it as special and memorable as it was.



### Tourism Operators & Dive Centres



### Governmental Organisations



Above: Participating organisations for Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025.

## 5. SPONSORS & PARTNERS

In 2025, we were fortunate to receive the highest level of sponsorship in the history of the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival, raising more funding than ever before (Table 8).

A total of 22 sponsors, and six supporting partners helped us bring the event to life, demonstrating their commitment to the community and marine conservation.

### Title Sponsor



### Main Sponsors



### Co-Sponsors



### Co-Sponsor Plus



### Supporting Partners



Above: Sponsors and Supporting Partners of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025



As a small, non-governmental organisation, Naifaru Juvenile and Atoll Marine Conservation Centre rely heavily on external partnerships to make the festival possible each year. We are greatly encouraged by the growing number of companies choosing to support us and their increasing enthusiasm shown. This momentum reflects the steady growth of the festival and its progress toward becoming a cornerstone event for marine conservation in the Maldives.

In 2025, we were honoured to welcome back Six Senses Kanuhura as the event's Title Sponsor for the second consecutive year, whose support was instrumental in making the festival a phenomenal success. We were equally delighted to secure a record of seven Main Sponsors including Maldives Islamic Bank, Noku Maldives, Emerald Faarufushi Resort & Spa, Cora Cora Maldives, The Standard, Manta Air, and the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.

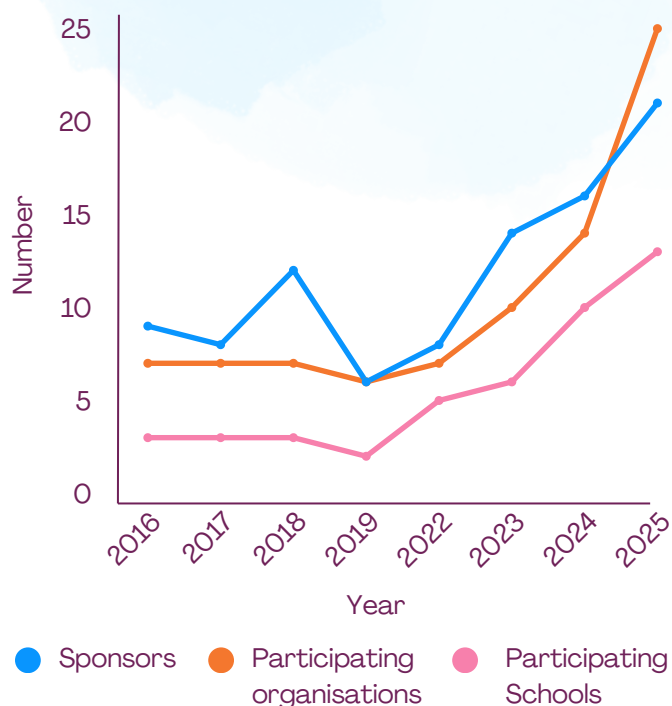
Alongside these were a wide range of Co-Sponsors and Supporting Partners who contributed generously, from direct monetary donation, to in-kind provisions such as competition prizes, soft drinks, and school transport (Table 6). This strong backing ensures the festival flourishes, both as a community celebration, and a driver of meaningful conservation initiatives.



Above: AMC's Marine Biologist with our partners at Noku Maldives resort, a main sponsors of the turtle festival.

Sponsorship is essential for enabling us to bring students from different and more distant islands, reducing barriers to participation, and strengthening connections across the country.

It is clear to see, that as the number of sponsors increase each year, so does the number of participating schools and organisations (Figure 3). This demonstrates and the vital role that sponsorship has, not only in sustaining the festival, but also in scaling it's impact for conservation across the Maldives by directly enhancing reach and inclusivity.



**Figure 3.** Number of sponsors (blue) organisations (orange), and schools (pink) supporting and participating in Lhaviyani Turtle Festival from 2016 to 2025.

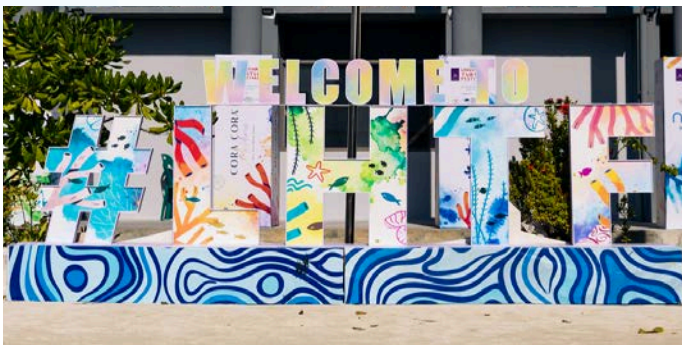


Above: Stalls at Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025

## 6. OVERVIEW OF SCHEDULE AND ACTIVITIES

Over the years, the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival has evolved from a single-day gathering into a two-day celebration of science, conservation, and culture, bringing the community together for an entire weekend dedicated to ocean awareness.

The event kicks-off with the Atoll Marine Symposium, which was first introduced in 2023, and takes place on the Friday before the main festival. The symposium brings together NGOs, researchers, and marine experts to present findings, share knowledge, and discuss pressing marine conservation challenges in the Maldives. Previously, the symposium has welcomed organisations from the Maldives, India, and South Africa, creating opportunities for cross-border learning and the development of shared solutions. On the following day, the festival unfolds in full colour on Velaa Beach, showcasing a vibrant mix of community spirit, cultural pride, and ocean stewardship through interactive activities, competitions, and performances.



Above: Lhaviyani Turtle Festival sign outside the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium venue. Photo taken by Dhauru media.

## 7. DAY 1: THE 3RD ATOLL MARINE SYMPOSIUM

On Friday 5th September 2025, the 3rd Atoll Marine Symposium was held at the Multi-Purpose Building in Lh. Naifaru, for a full-day event, taking place from 8:30AM – 5:30PM.

Previously, the event was held at Villa College, but having reflected on last year's progress, moving the venue to a larger venue made the space feel less crowded and allowed for a larger audience. We believe this upgrade in venue is a nice reflection of how the symposium has grown.



Above: Audience at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium. Images taken by I-Shutter (top) and AMC staff (bottom).

## THEME AND TOPICS

The theme for this year's symposium, **“Currents of Connection: Communities, Culture, and Conservation”** drew on the movement of ocean currents as a metaphor for the connectivity between marine ecosystems and the role of communities in protecting them. It was a call to look beyond isolated issues and embrace the bigger picture for ocean conservation, inviting us to think holistically about how scientific understanding, cultural values, and local voices can shape ocean protection.



Within this broad theme, we identified three key topics to focus on, reflecting prominent environmental issues that had emerged over the year, drawing inspiration from the themes of other major environmental awareness days.

These included:

**1) Ecological Connectivity & Ocean Health**, examining the interconnected threads that link different marine ecosystems and wildlife.

**2) Solutions for Ocean Pollution**, to address the pressing issue of plastic pollution and other debris in the marine environment and how to tackle that more practically within the Maldives.

**3) Communities & Youth in Conservation**, to highlight community-led and youth-driven efforts, as well as the role of traditional knowledge and inclusive leadership at a local level.

## OPENING CEREMONY

We were pleased to invite Mr. Hassan Mohamed, Chief Executive of the Environmental Regulatory Authority, as our Guest of Honour for the Symposium, who opened the event with an welcoming speech.



Above: Guest of Honour Mr. Hassan Mohamed, Chief Executive of the Environmental Regulatory Authority, delivering an opening speech at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

## PRESENTATIONS

A total of 11 keynote speakers presented throughout the day, firstly beginning with those focused on Ecological Connectivity and Ocean Health. This included a talk about the use of artificial intelligence to assess coral reef health by Atolla, followed by the role of seagrass meadows as vital interconnecting marine habitats by Six Senses Kanuhura, and the importance of habitat connectivity for species such as sea turtles, presented by Atoll Marine Conservation Centre.



Above: Presentation by Ismail Houd Rizvee from Atolla. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

Velaa Coral Project presented their experience with biorock technology to enhance their coral restoration efforts, while Maldives Resilient Reefs discussed their research on nutrient dynamics between mangroves and seagrasses. Finally, Dr. Ahmed Riyaz Jauharee from the Maldives National University discussed the sustainability of tuna fisheries in the Maldives.



Above: Presentation by Athif from Atoll Marine Conservation Centre. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.



Above: Presentation by Agne Gričiute, Marine Biologist, at Velaa Private Island. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

In the afternoon, the conversation then shifted to *Solutions for Ocean Pollution*. We heard from Secret Paradise Maldives, a sustainable tour-operating company, who talked about the issue of plastic pollution and how it affects the Maldives. They shared what is already being done across the country to tackle this problem, including their own 'Leave No Trace' policy.



Above: Presentation by Dr. Ahmed Riyaz Jauharee, Dean of College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences at Maldives National University. Photo taken by I-Shutter.

We also heard from The Vibe NGO, who shared insights into their work engaging youth volunteers and exploring international solutions to plastic pollution. They shared how these could be adapted to or implemented in the Maldives through collaboration with organizations already developing innovative approaches.

Their presentation included heart-warming anecdotes highlighting how young people can be powerful change-makers—some even calling out their parents for unsustainable behaviours. They also reflected on the observation that tourists often show greater interest in protecting the local environment than citizens do, emphasizing the need to further strengthen environmental education and awareness within local communities. This tied in very nicely with the next thematic session on *Communities and Youth in Conservation*.



Above: Presentation by Mohamed Abdula from the VIBE NGO. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

The Olive Ridley Project kicked-off the segment with a talk about the success of their sea turtle Ranger Program, which supports local involvement in turtle conservation.



Above: Presentation by Inaan Ahmed from the Olive Ridley Project. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



This was followed by a talk from the Miyaru Programme, who shared insights into the global population declines of Indo-Pacific Leopard Sharks and highlighted the lack of scientific data on this species in the Maldives. Currently, most information about leopard sharks in the country comes from traditional ecological knowledge, particularly from local fishermen, as no formal studies have yet been conducted.

To address this gap, the Miyaru Programme introduced the “Spot On” project—an initiative that aims to establish the leopard shark as a flagship species for marine conservation in the Maldives. The project focuses on developing a community-driven research approach, encouraging fishermen, dive guides, and other ocean users to identify and map key habitats through a citizen science app. By engaging local communities directly in research, the initiative fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for conservation.



Above: Presentation by Hamna Hussain, co-founder of the Miyaru Programme. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

The final segment concluded with a presentation from the Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI), who shared success from their *Hello Hallu* (Hello Solution) education program, which aims to increase environmental education in schools across Laamu.

We heard about the meaningful impacts this program has had on student’s ideology surrounding seagrass habitats, shifting negative perspectives to positive ones. They also shone a spotlight on inspiring individuals from Laamu who are creating a better future for their island communities, which depend on the health of the ocean every day.



Above: Presentation by Aishath Fithura from MUI. Photo taken by I-Shutter.

Many of the presentations showcased each organisation’s real-world actions to drive behaviour change and advance research that strengthens the connection between communities and conservation. Together, they highlighted how people and the environment are deeply interdependent—each supporting and shaping the other in countless ways.



Above: Questions from the audience. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



## PANEL DISCUSSIONS

For each of the three thematic topics, a panel discussion followed the presentations, allowing for deeper reflections and the consolidation of key ideas. These sessions created space for dynamic, interactive dialogue among experts.

20  
EXPERT  
PANELISTS



Above: Panelist during the Communities & Youth in Conservation Panel Discussion. photo taken by Dhauru Media.



Above: Solutions for Ocean Pollution panellists. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Above: Panelists during the Communities & Youth in Conservation Panel Discussion. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

The AMC team prepared a series of thought-provoking questions designed to encourage an open exchange of perspectives, resulting in engaging, free-flowing conversations and truly inspiring insights.



Above: Communities and Youth in Conservation panel discussion. Photo taken by I-Shutter.





Above: Audience members. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Above: Madhrasathul Ifthithaah in the audience, listening to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium presentations. Photo taken by I-Shutter.

This year the event attracted a total 96 attendees—our highest turn-out to date! Amongst those were our 11 keynote speakers, along with an additional 11 panellists (of which there were 20 all together), totalling 22 active participants!

We were also delighted to welcome 13 students from Madhrasathul Ifthithaah and 14 students from Himandhoo School as audience members, along with 13 local volunteers, many of whom are also still in school. They listened attentively throughout the event, and we hope they left feeling inspired—not only by the insightful discussions about marine conservation and the career opportunities within the field, but also by witnessing their own efforts contribute to a successful event. The remaining 30+ audience members included 11 AMC staff and 15 representatives from other NGOs and government bodies.



Above: Marine Biology Assistant, Rasheedath Anum, delivering a closing speech during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

The full Symposium schedule can be found in the Appendix (Page 47). Additionally, the entire Symposium was livestreamed on our YouTube Channel and is available to watch via [this link](#).



Above: Group photo with Symposium organisers, presenters, and audience members, including Madhrasathul Ifthithaah and Himandhoo School students. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



## 8. DAY 2: FESTIVAL DAY

On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2025, the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival took place on Velaa Beach, directly outside Atoll Marine Conservation Centre.

The area hosted 29 marine awareness stalls which aimed to educate festival-goers about marine conservation—our highest number of marine awareness stalls so far! Each stall offered hands-on games, creative activities, and educational displays designed to make environmental awareness fun and accessible for all ages.



Above: Aerial view of the festival ground 2025. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Above: School students setting up their stalls. Photos taken by I-Shutter.

29  
MARINE  
AWARENESS  
STALLS

Above: School students visiting an NGO marine awareness stall. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

### ARRIVAL & SET-UP

Festival day is focussed on the school students, and we welcomed their arrival in the early hours of the morning, for a full day

of ocean learning ahead! Welcoming them to the island is always one of the most exciting moments, filled with energy and anticipation for what the day has in store. For many, it's also their first time visiting Naifaruu, making the experience even more memorable.

The students began the day by setting up their stalls, as they were progressively joined by NGOs, government institutions, resort marine biologists, and other organisations. Over the next couple of hours, we watched Velaa Beach transform into a lively festival ground!





Above: Imaduddin School setting up their stall. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

After the stalls are set up, competition judging can begin! Our panel of judges visited each stall to score the schools on their competition entries, as well as the local competition entries.



Above: Lhaviyani Turtle Festival official competition judges judging the competitions. Photos taken by I-Shutter.

Competitions are a core part of the event, and you can read about them in more detail on page 30.

## PRESENTATIONS

During the 2024 turtle festival, three presentations were delivered to school students on the festival day itself—by Atoll Marine Conservation Centre, the Olive Ridley Project, and the Miyaru Programme. These sessions were highly successful and aligned perfectly with the festival's core mission of educating and inspiring the next generation about marine conservation.

Since the Atoll Marine Symposium, held the day before the festival, mostly targets professionals and older audiences, we recognised the importance of offering tailored to our younger participants.



Above: School students listening to marine science and conservation presentations at the main stage. Images taken by I-Shutter.

This year, NGOs were invited to deliver interactive presentations adapted for students, and encouraged all sessions to be conducted in Dhivehi to maintain inclusivity.

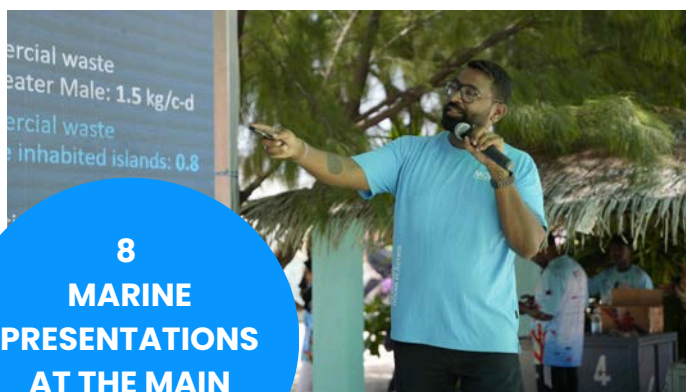


Students attended different presentations throughout the day, allowing everyone to experience at least one engaging talk and gain a deeper understanding of marine conservation in a structured setting.



Above: School students listening to marine science and conservation presentations at the main stage. Image taken by I-Shutter.

A total of eight presentations were delivered by organisations including Atoll Marine Conservation Centre, Atolla, Maldives Resilient Reefs, Maldives Ocean Plastics Alliance, Maldives Manta Conservation Program, Maldives National University, and the Olive Ridley Project.



**8  
MARINE  
PRESENTATIONS  
AT THE MAIN  
STAGE**

Above: Marine presentations at the main stage.

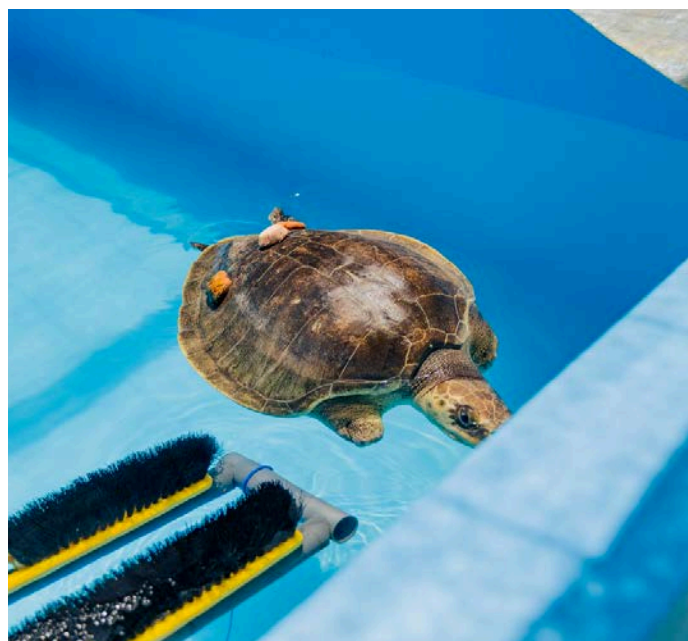
The titles of each presentation are listed in the festival schedule, which can be found in the Appendix on page 49.

We believe that these presentations form an essential part of what makes the festival impactful and well-rounded. They provide students an opportunity to learn directly from professionals. Indeed, they were well received by the students. One child from Dhuvafaaru Primary School even said that listening to the presentations was their favourite part of the day because they **“learned many new things”**.

## AMC VISITS

Another highlight of the festival is the fact that Atoll Marine Conservation Centre opens its doors to the public during designated visiting hours.

This gives festival-goers the opportunity to meet the injured sea turtle patients currently under our care and they can hear directly from AMC staff about each turtle’s story, including how they were rescued, the treatment they are receiving, and their journey towards release back into the wild.



Above: One of Atoll Marine Conservation Centre’s long-term sea turtle patients, Cora, in his tank. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.





Above: Visitors to AMC during the festival. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.

This opportunity to visit AMC may be the only chance many of these students get, particularly those travelling from distant islands. Every student received a tour of the centre, and we were delighted to welcome so many curious young minds, many of whom had never seen a sea turtle before! For them, it was a powerful experience to witness first-hand the impacts of human activities on these endangered species, which is precisely why we hold the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival each year—to raise awareness about the human-induced threats facing marine wildlife and habitats.



Above: Students visiting AMC. Photos taken by AMC staff.

## OPENING CEREMONY

At 1:00 PM, the opening ceremony of the festival took place at the main stage, marking its official opening to the public, including local residents, resort staff, international guests, and visitors from neighbouring islands.

The ceremony began with a speech by AMC's Marine Team Lead, Bennath, who reflected on the festival's growth over the years and the importance of hosting such an impactful event:

***“The more people who understand the magic of our oceans, as the life support system of our entire planet, and the challenges that it currently faces, the stronger our chance is of creating change.”***

***Hope is easier to hold onto when others are reaching for it too, and that's why we are proud of this festival as it brings together experts, communities, and young people, to celebrate the marine environment and everything it offers us.***

***Our wish is that every student here today leaves with a sense of responsibility for the ocean, and with the inspiration to do whatever they can to protect it—even if it's simply using their voice.”***



Above: AMC's Marine Team Lead, Bennath, delivering a speech at the opening ceremony.



We were then delighted to welcome our Guest of Honour, Ms. Alicia Graham, General Manager of Six Senses Kanuhura, to the stage.

Ms. Graham expressed how inspired she was by the dedication and enthusiasm displayed throughout the event. She spoke about Six Senses Kanuhura's ongoing commitment to protecting local marine life and shared her pride in supporting the festival as the title sponsor. She also took a moment to acknowledge the valuable contributions of all other sponsors and warmly welcomed the 13 participating schools to the celebration.



Above: Guest of Honour, Ms Alicia Graham, General Manager of Six Senses Kanuhura during the opening ceremony. Photos taken by I-Shutter.

We then heard a heartfelt testimonial from a student of Imaduddin School, who shared what it meant to have the opportunity to attend the festival and how much they had learned from the experience.

As a marine science student, they spoke about the importance of turtle conservation and how events like this helped deepen their appreciation for protecting marine life.



Above: Student from Imaduddin School delivering an testimonial about the festival during the opening ceremony. Photo taken by I-Shutter.

Finally, Mohamed Ahmed Fulhu, Co-founder of Atoll Marine Conservation Centre and Vice Chairperson of Naifaru Juvenile, delivered a speech in Dhivehi, highlighting the opportunities available for young Maldivians to enter the marine field through AMC's local intern training program.

He spoke about how this initiative helps to build valuable skills and create meaningful career pathways for the next generation of environmental professionals. His words clearly resonated with the audience; following the festival, we received an influx of interest from young locals eager to join AMC as interns!



Above: Co-founder of Atoll Marine Centre delivering a speech during the opening ceremony. Photo taken by I-Shutter.





Above: Audience members during the opening ceremony. Photo taken by Home Gallery.

Following the opening speeches, the ceremony concluded with the lively Traditional Dance Performance Competition, which is always a true highlight of the festival!

These performances showcase Maldivian culture in its most vibrant and joyful form; filling Velaa Beach with rhythm, colour, and excitement. More details can be found in the Competitions section on page 30.



Above: Traditional dance performances during the opening ceremony. Photos taken by Home Gallery.



## MARINE AWARENESS STALLS

Building on the success of last year's layout, we maintained the same arrangement of alternating school, NGO, and resort stalls. This proved effective once again at fostering greater interaction between students and professionals, creating a cohesive and engaging environment throughout the festival grounds



Above: Aerial view of the festival ground on Velaa Beach, Lh. Naifaru. Photo taken by I-Shutter.

Throughout the day, the marine awareness stalls remained open to everyone, from children and adults alike. Students had the opportunity not only to educate others at their own stalls but also explore those of other organisations and schools. This encouraged meaningful exchanges between students and experts, allowing them to learn more about different areas of marine conservation.



Above: Local youth visiting a marine awareness stall. Photo taken by Owen Bornhorst.



Above: Local youth visiting marine awareness stalls. Photos taken by I-Shutter.

Feedback from students further highlighted how impactful this interaction was. Students shared how much they enjoyed **“seeing what other schools and NGOs had done”**, **“meeting new people at the stalls”** and **“playing games at other stalls.”** In total, 28% of students completing the feedback form specifically mentioned that the stalls were their favourite part of the festival (Figure 5), emphasising how this setup continues to be one of the most successful elements of the event.



Above: Local youth visiting a marine awareness stall. Photo taken by Elsa Stocking.



## RECONNECTING DUO ARRIVAL

In a truly special initiative, the 2025 Lhaviyani Turtle Festival proudly welcomed the arrival of the “Reconnecting Duo” to Velaa Beach on the afternoon of the festival. This inspiring initiative was led by Mr. Muiz Mohamed, Resort Manager of Cora Cora Maldives, and Mr. Justin Stewart, former General Manager of Cora Cora and now General Manager of The Standard Huruvalhi—both located in Raa Atoll and Main Sponsors of the festival.



Above: Reconnecting duo arriving to Velaa Beach after paddleboarding 69k from Raa Atoll. Photo taken by Home Gallery.

The pair teamed up to paddleboard 69km from Raa Atoll to Naifaru for a truly exciting arrival! This took two days to complete, and the initiative was endorsed by Visit Maldives Cooperation.



Above: Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Above: Reconnecting duo arriving to Velaa Beach after paddleboarding 69k from Raa Atoll. Photo taken by Home Gallery.

The initiative was titled “Stand Up for Sea Turtles,” a play on words that reflected both the use of stand-up paddleboards and the deeper message behind their journey—the need for all of us to stand up and raise our voices to protect sea turtles. Indeed, the aim of the initiative was to raise awareness about the threats sea turtles face in the Maldives, including ghost nets, poaching, and plastic pollution.

Their arrival was met with great excitement and a warm welcome from the Naifaru community, complete with a traditional dance performance to celebrate their achievement.

The symbolism of two different resort leaders coming together for a shared environmental cause perfectly embodied the spirit of the festival—bringing people together to protect marine life and inspire collective action for our ocean’s future.



Above: Photo taken by Home Gallery.



## AWARDS AND CLOSING CEREMONY

The Closing Ceremony marked a joyful conclusion to the festival—a time to recognise and celebrate everyone’s hard work and participation, particularly the school students. This moment is always highly anticipated, and several students even shared that the excitement of hearing the winners announced was their favourite part of the day. It was a pleasure to witness the genuine sportsmanship displayed, with students cheering and congratulating one another, regardless of which school took home the prizes.

During the ceremony, the winners, runners-up, and third-place participants from each competition were invited to the stage to receive their recognition.

As the celebrations came to a close, students and teachers departed for their home islands after an exciting, educational, and inspiring day, while the AMC and Naifaru Juvenile teams gathered for a final group photograph, marking the end of another successful Lhaviyani Turtle Festival.



*Above: School students receiving their competition prizes during the closing ceremony. Photos taken by I-Shutter.*

Further information about the competition winners and prizes can be found on pages 40 & 41.



*Above: Group photo with the event team including AMC and Naifaru Juvenile staff, and local volunteers. Photo taken by I-Shutter.*



## 9. COMPETITIONS

One of the key components that makes the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival so engaging and memorable is the wide range of competitions that the students and the community are invited to take part in. In order to attend the festival, schools are required to enter three key competitions—the Best Stall Design Competition, the Sea Turtle Sand Sculpture Competition, and the Waste Sculpture Competition.

In addition to these, there are several optional competitions open to both school students and the local community, offering the chance to win exciting cash prizes. This adds an element of excitement and friendly rivalry to the event, inspiring participants to give their best effort while promoting teamwork, creativity, and environmental stewardship.

### BEST STALL DESIGN COMPETITION

Schools are judged on the design of their marine awareness stall, which should educate festival goers about marine science and conservation through fun, engaging games and activities. The stall should also be eye-catching, creative, and made with recycled materials as much as possible. Extra points are given to stalls made entirely from recycled waste!

Every year, we are blown away by the imagination, effort, and creativity demonstrated by students through their stall designs—and the 2025 festival set an even higher standard for 2026!

During the morning, students presented their stalls to the judging panel, proudly explaining their concepts and the environmental messages behind them. It was heart-warming to see how much care, thought, and teamwork had gone into each display.



Above: School's stalls. Photos taken by I-Shutter.



Above: Students explaining their stall design and activities to the turtle festival judges. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Throughout the day, students continued to engage enthusiastically with visitors, eagerly inviting them to participate in their activities. At every stall, their excitement and pride were unmistakable, and the impact of this competition was evident in the feedback we received from both students and teachers:

**“My favourite part was seeing the creativity of the stalls—especially the student-made products from recycled materials]... [It was inspiring to see how sustainability can be showcased through art and teamwork].” - Leading teacher, Dhuvafaaru Primary School.**

**“My favourite part was getting the chance to present our work and seeing how everyone came to our stall and enjoyed it.” - Student, Lh. Atoll Education Center.**

**“My favourite part of the day was visiting other stalls and checking out what they did, other than working in our own stall’ - Student, Afeefuddin School.**



Above: Runner-up school stall. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Above: Meyna School's Stall (3rd Place Prize). Photos taken by the competition judges.



Above: Creative use of plastic water bottles to make stall decorations. Images taken by AMC staff.



Above: Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025. Photo taken by Dhauru Media.



## WASTE SCULPTURE

The waste sculpture competition is another great display of creativity, encouraging students to think about how they can upcycle discarded materials into beautiful new pieces of art. Each sculpture should represent a specific marine animal and utilise as much recycled waste as possible for its construction and decoration.



Above: Waste sculpture made by Baa Atoll Education Center (2nd Place Prize). Photo taken by Home Gallery.

This year's waste sculpture entries exceeded all expectations, turning every-day materials into striking artwork pieces. Students seamlessly integrated their waste sculptures into their stall designs, creating a cohesive visual display that tied the two competitions together beautifully. These elements became one of the main attractions on Velaa Beach, drawing crowds and sparking important conversations about environmental responsibility.



Above: Hulhudhuffaaruu School's waste sculpture (3rd Place Prize). Photo taken by Home Gallery.



Above: Winning waste sculpture, by Lh. Atoll School. Photos taken by I-Shutter.

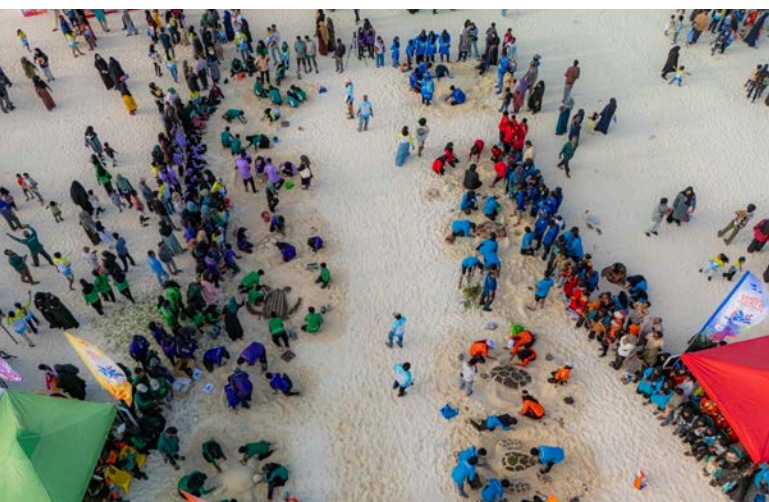
The winners of the waste sculpture competition were none other than Lh. Atoll School! Their large, intricately designed tuna sculpture was a standout piece that drew the attention and awe of all festival-goers. What set it apart was not just its size and craftsmanship, but the powerful environmental message it carried. The sculpture featured an open section in the middle of the tuna, revealing a stomach filled with plastic waste and the words, "Do you know you are consuming the plastic you throw into the ocean?"

This piece powerfully communicated the dangers of marine plastic pollution—not just to sea life, but to human health as well. It was a strong reminder of the consequences of improper plastic disposal, and a sign that the younger generation is becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues.



## SEA TURTLE SAND SCULPTURE

The last, and possibly the most popular of the mandatory school competitions is the Sea Turtle Sand Sculpture Competition. Indeed, when students were asked what their favourite part of the day was, the most common answer was the Sand Sculpture Competition (Figure 5).



Above: Drone shots of the Sea Turtle Sand Sculpture Competition taking place on Velaa Beach. Photo taken by I-Shutter.

Students are challenged, in teams of 5, to create a biologically accurate sculpture of a sea turtle species of their choice, using only sand and natural materials from the beach. They are encouraged to study their chosen species beforehand, with the aim of deepening their understanding of sea turtle anatomy.



Above: School students participating in the Sea Turtle Sand Sculpture competition. Photos taken by I-Shutter.

Each team was given one hour to complete their sculpture, adding an element of excitement and friendly pressure. The results were remarkable—many teams showed exceptional creativity with their use of natural materials from the beach to enhance the visual impact of their sculpture.

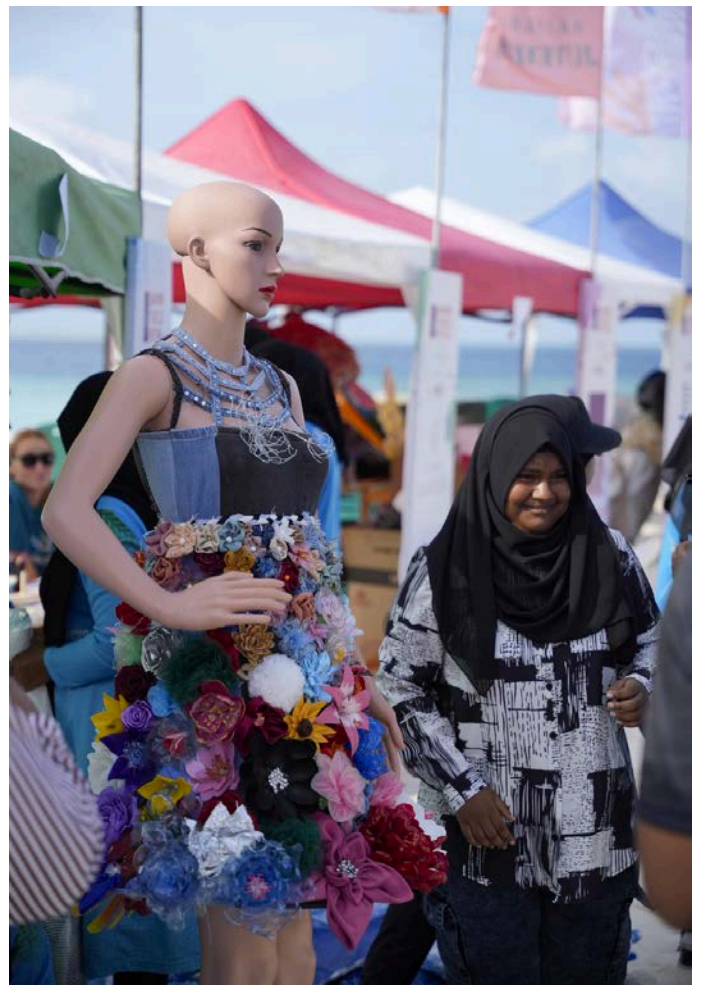


## RECYCLED DRESS & BAG MAKING

The recycled dress and bag making competitions, are two optional competitions with a focus on tackling unsustainable waste consumption and disposal habits by encouraging participants to transform waste into wearable, eco-friendly fashion!

The goal is to design and construct a dress or bag entirely from recycled materials, challenging us to rethink how we view waste—not as something to discard, but rather something with creative and practical potential.

Although participation in the competition was optional, all 13 attending schools chose to take part in either the recycled dress or the recycled bag competition, with many entering both!



Above: Recycled dress by Lh. Atoll School. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Above: First place prize for the recycled dress competition (by Baa Atoll School). Photo taken by I-Shutter.



Above: Recycled bags. Photo taken by the competition judges.

We also had seven local community members submit their entries, demonstrating how the event continues to inspire participation beyond the classroom and into the wider community.



## TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE

## DANCE

The Traditional Dance Performance Competition is a stunning cultural highlight and a long-standing staple of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival, consistently drawing the largest crowds and generating the loudest cheers. In 2025, audiences were treated to eight incredible performances, each one a vibrant celebration of Maldivian heritage through colour, music, and movement.

Integrating cultural expression into the festival is essential to its identity, and was particularly fitting with this year's Symposium theme "*Communities, Culture and Conservation*". This theme underscores the deep interconnections between people, traditional practices, and ecological knowledge in shaping conservation and sustainability. The competition beautifully embodies this message, reminding us that conservation is not only about protecting ecosystems, but also about preserving cultural traditions and community values that coexist with them.

Beyond its symbolic importance, the event created a joyful and unifying atmosphere, demonstrating that raising environmental awareness can also be celebratory and fun. Each performance brought a contagious energy to the stage, captivating the audience and making it one of the most popular activities of the festival amongst students (Figure 5) and the community alike.



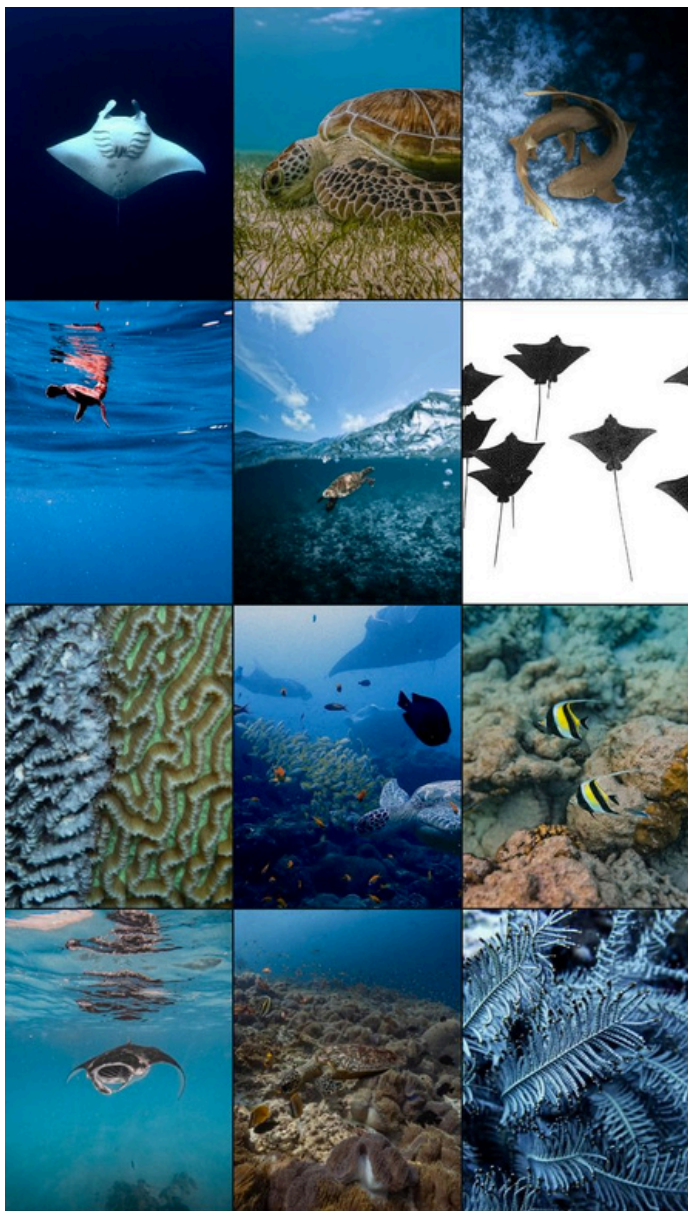
Above: Traditional Dance Performances. Photos taken by I-Shutter.



## UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

The Underwater Photography Competition invited ocean enthusiasts from across the Maldives to capture and share the beauty and biodiversity of marine life through the lens of their cameras.

By showcasing the richness of the underwater world, the competition aimed to inspire appreciation and wonder—particularly among those who may not have experienced it first-hand.



Above: Entries to the Underwater Photography Competition, using the Instagram hashtag ‘#LHTF2025PhotoComp’. Screenshot taken from the Instagram IOS app.

In 2025, 12 entries were submitted via social media under the hashtag #LTF2025PhotoComp. Collectively, these images offered a stunning glimpse into the hidden life beneath the ocean’s waves, reminding viewers about the importance of ocean conservation and the fragile ecosystems we strive to protect—bringing the beauty of marine wildlife and habitats closer to those of us on land.

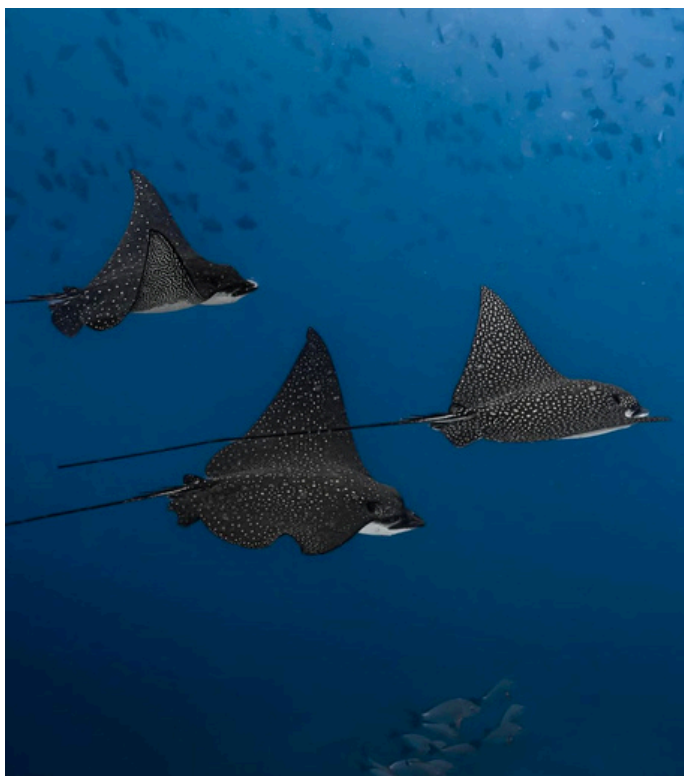
The People’s Choice winner, awarded based on the highest number of likes on Instagram, went to a striking photograph of a green sea turtle feeding in the iconic seagrass meadows of Kuredu Island Resort.



Above: Winner of the People’s Choice Underwater Photography Competition. Image taken by (@yaambe\_007).

The Judges’ Choice winner was presented to an image capturing a group of white-spotted eagle rays gracefully moving through the ocean.





Above: Winner of the Judge's Choice Underwater Photography Competition. Photo taken by (@rebeccabrown\_).

Through creative expression, the competition shows that storytelling through visual media can play a powerful role in fostering emotional connections with nature and inspiring collective action to protect it.

## LUCKY RAFFLE DRAW

Continuing from its success in 2024, the Lucky Raffle Draw returned once again in 2025, with two prize categories: one for participants who purchased a festival t-shirt, and another for those who scanned the QR code at the entrance. This initiative continues to be a fun way to encourage participation while supporting the festival's fundraising efforts.

We are always delighted to see Velaa Beach fill with attendees proudly wearing the festival t-shirts. It's a visual representation of community support for our mission to protect and celebrate the marine environment, creating a strong sense of unity and pride .

## PLASTIC BOTTLE COLLECTION COMPETITION

The Plastic Bottle Collection Competition has become another iconic component of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival, inspiring both school students and local communities to take meaningful action towards a cleaner environment.

Waste management and plastic pollution remain major challenges in the Maldives, and this week-long competition, held in the lead-up to the festival, hopes to address these by fostering environmental responsibility and community collaboration. Teams are challenged to collect as many recyclable plastic bottles (types 1, 2, and 5) as possible, whether through beach clean-ups or from household waste collections.



Above: Baa Atoll School (top) and Meyna School (bottom) collecting plastic waste from the beach during the Plastic Bottle Collection Competition. Photos taken by school teachers.



All the collected plastic was sent to recycling partners such as Parley Maldives and Maldives Ocean Plastics Alliance (MOPA) to be processed into new products. Indeed, an exciting opportunity that emerged from the 2025 competition was a new collaboration with MOPA, who generously supplied 80 jumbo bags to participating schools, and assisted with transport logistics, ensuring that all plastic made it to Malé for recycling—support for which we are deeply grateful.



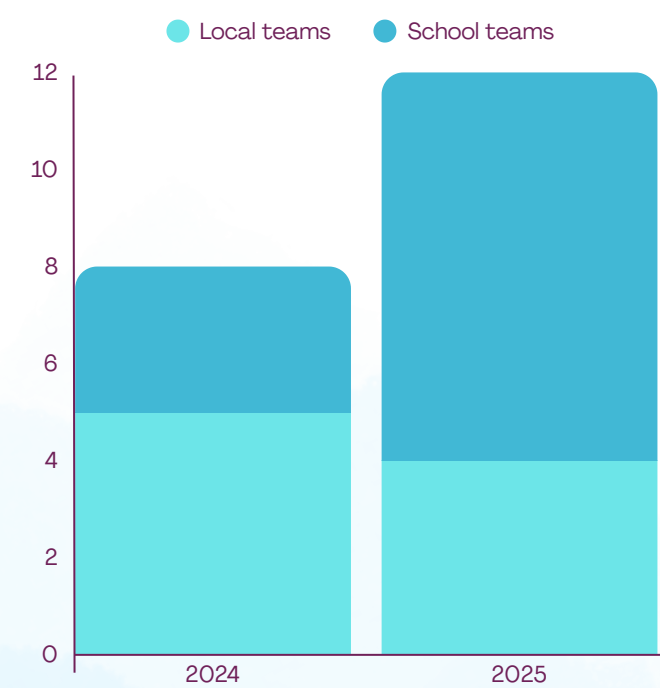
Above: Local teams’ plastic collections during the Plastic Bottle Collection Competition.



Above: Meyna School students during a beach clean for the Plastic Bottle Collection Competition. Photo taken by the school teacher.

In 2025, the competition reached remarkable new heights, expanding its reach and participation more than ever before!

What began as a local effort in Naifaru has now grown into a nationwide initiative, spanning six different atolls and stretching more than 550 km south of Naifaru to Addu City in the far south of the Maldives. Out of the thirteen schools attending the festival, an impressive eight of these participated in the competition, along with four local teams, including three from Naifaru, and a local NGO ‘Veshisaafu’ based in Addu City—showing that wherever you are in the Maldives, you can be a part of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival! This brought the total number of teams to 12, which was a promising increase from last year’s total of eight (Figure 4.)



**Figure 4.** Number of teams participating in the Plastic Bottle Collection Competition in 2024 and 2025.

Building excitement and anticipation ahead of the main event, the competition ran from August 26<sup>th</sup> to September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2025, with teams of up to five members collecting plastic bottles from their respective areas. At the end of the week, teams based in Naifaru brought their collections to Atoll Marine Centre for an in-person weighing ceremony, while those based in other islands completed virtual weigh-ins, facilitated by a designated official for fair verification.



Each team put together an awareness video about the importance of maintaining a healthy marine environment, whilst showcasing their clean-up efforts during the competition. These videos were later screened during the festival, inspiring attendees and celebrating the participants' hard work.

The school winners were Kudafaree, who collected a staggering 1,216.85kg of plastic, and the winners of the local teams were Plaasticaa Dhurah (Veshisaafu's team), who collected a similarly impressive 1,016.5kgs! In total, this amounted to more than 7,000 kgs of plastic collected in just one week (Table 2).



Above: School students during a beach clean for the Plastic Bottle Collection Competition. Photo by the school teachers.

This represents seven tonnes of waste that will no longer end up littering beaches, entering the ocean, or releasing emissions through open-air burning, which is currently the most common form of waste management on many islands due to the lack of recycling infrastructure.

These results demonstrate the transformative power of collective action. The enthusiasm, teamwork, and dedication of participants not only helped clean their local environment but also contributed meaningfully to a national effort to reduce plastic waste in the Maldives.

This success is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when communities unite for a shared environmental goal—protecting their islands today and preserving them for the generations to come.

**Table 2.** Weight of plastic collected by each Plastic Bottle Collection Competition Team.

School/ Local Team Name	Total Plastics Collected (kg)
Kudafaree School (Noonu Atoll)	1216.85
Hulhudhuffaar School (Raa Atoll)	1092.5
Afeefuddin School (Haa Dhaal Atoll)	768.41
Meyna School (Noonu Atoll)	614.42
Lh. Atoll Education Centre (Lhaviyani Atoll)	225.3
Baa Atoll School (Baa Atoll)	374.2
Madhrasathul Ifthithaah (Lhaviyani Atoll)	357
Dhuvaafaru Primary School (Raa Atoll)	325
Plaasticaa Dhurah (Local Team, Addu City)	1016.5
Team Falak (Local Team, Naifaru)	815.9
EcoTroop (Local Team, Naifaru)	156.8
The Twin Flames (Local Team, Naifaru)	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>7005.88</b>



# COMETITION SUMMARY AND PRIZES

We were truly impressed by the commitment shown by all the participating schools in 2025, many of which signed up for the majority of optional competitions.

Lh. Atoll School from Kurendhoo were clear stars of the 2025 Lhaviyani Turtle Festival, taking home first place in an impressive total of four competitions (Table 3).

We were also delighted to see three of our newcomer schools—Afeefuddin, Himandhoo School, and Meyna School—all win prizes during their first year of attendance, showing great motivation and effort despite being new to the event (Table 3).

Seeing the students’ creativity, teamwork, and growing confidence through these competitions was one of the most rewarding parts of the festival, and a real reminder of why engaging youth in marine conservation is so important for the future.

**Table 3.** 2025 school competition winners

	Best Stall Design	Waste Sculpture	Sand Sculpture	Recycled Dress	Recycled Bag	Traditional Dance	Plastic Bottle Collection
1 <sup>st</sup>	Lh. Atoll School	Lh. Atoll School	Lh. Atoll School	Baa Atoll School	Meyna School	Lh. Atoll School	Kudafaree School
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Lh. Atoll Education Centre	Baa Atoll Education Centre	Baa Atoll School	Hulhudhuff-aaru School	Dhuvaafaru Primary School	Baa Atoll Education Centre	Hulhudhuff-aaru School
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Meyna School	Hulhudhuff-aaru School	Himandhoo School	Dhuvaafaru Primary School	Lh. Atoll Education Centre	Afeefuddin School	Afeefuddin School

Thanks to the generous support of our sponsors, this year’s competitions saw an exciting increase in rewards (Table 4) compared to previous years, both in cash value and in-kind contributions. This reflects the festival’s expanding recognition and the growing commitment and enthusiasm from partner resorts and companies to support environmental awareness and community-driven initiatives.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Robinson Noonu, who generously contributed two complimentary resort stays: one awarded to the winner of the People’s Choice Photography Competition (for the photo with the most likes on Instagram), and another as the winning prize for the QR Code Lucky Raffle Draw (Table 5).

Our appreciation also goes to Le Meridien Resort and Spa, who kindly donated a one-night stay for the winner of the Festival T-shirt Raffle Draw (Table 5). In addition, BeKind offered a three-night stay for five people to the winning team of the Local Plastic Bottle Collection Competition! (Table 5).





**Table 4.** 2025 school competition prizes

	Best Stall Design	Waste Sculpture	Sand Sculpture	Recycled Dress	Recycled Bag	Traditional Dance	Plastic Bottle Collection
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	MVR 1,500	MVR 1,500	MVR 1,500	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,500	MVR 1,500
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,000	MVR 700	MVR 700	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,000
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	MVR 700	MVR 700	MVR 700	MVR 500	MVR 500	MVR 700	MVR 700

**Table 5.** 2025 Community competition prizes

	Recycled Dress	Recycled Bag	Traditional Dance	Plastic Bottle Collection	Underwater Photography	Lucky Raffle
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	MVR 1,500	MVR 1,500	MVR 1,500	3-night stay at Fushifaru Maldives resort (5 pax, 2 villas) + MVR 1,000	<b>People's choice:</b> 3-night stay at Robinson Noonu resort (2 pax)	<b>QR code:</b> 3-night stay at Robinson Noonu resort (2 pax)
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,000	MVR 1,000	<b>Judge's choice:</b> MVR 1,000	<b>T-shirt:</b> 1-night stay at Le Meridien Resort & Spa (2 pax)
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	MVR 700	MVR 700	MVR 700	MVR 700		



Above: The lively festival ground during the school's Sea Turtle Sand Sculpture Competition. Photo taken by I-Shutter.



## 10. IMPACT

The reason Atoll Marine Conservation Centre (AMC) and Naifaru Juvenile remain so proud of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival is because of the immense and lasting impact it has on school students and the wider community. Each year, the student's excitement is immediately visible on festival day, but in 2025, this impact was felt even more strongly. This year, we were honoured to receive letters and trophies of appreciation from two of our new participating schools—Imaaduddin School from Malé and Inguraidhoo School from Raa Atoll—who expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to attend the festival.



Above: Imaaduddin School presenting AMC with a certificate of appreciation and artwork piece to express their thanks for attending the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival. Photo taken by AMC staff.

These gestures reflect the festival's positive influence and growing reach across the Maldives. For many of the students, attending the festival, it is not only an educational experience but also an opportunity to connect with like-minded peers, discover new career pathways, and feel part of a wider movement working to protect the Maldives' marine environment.

A particularly memorable moment this year came from the students of Lh. Atoll Education Center in Hinnavaru, who shared with AMC staff that a component of their waste sculpture was inspired by the recently identified Atlantic Manta Ray (*Mobula yarae*). They explained how they learned about this species during one of AMC's outreach sessions at their school. This was a truly rewarding moment for the AMC team, as it demonstrated the real impact of our outreach work and how environmental education can spark creativity, curiosity, and long-term interest in marine life.

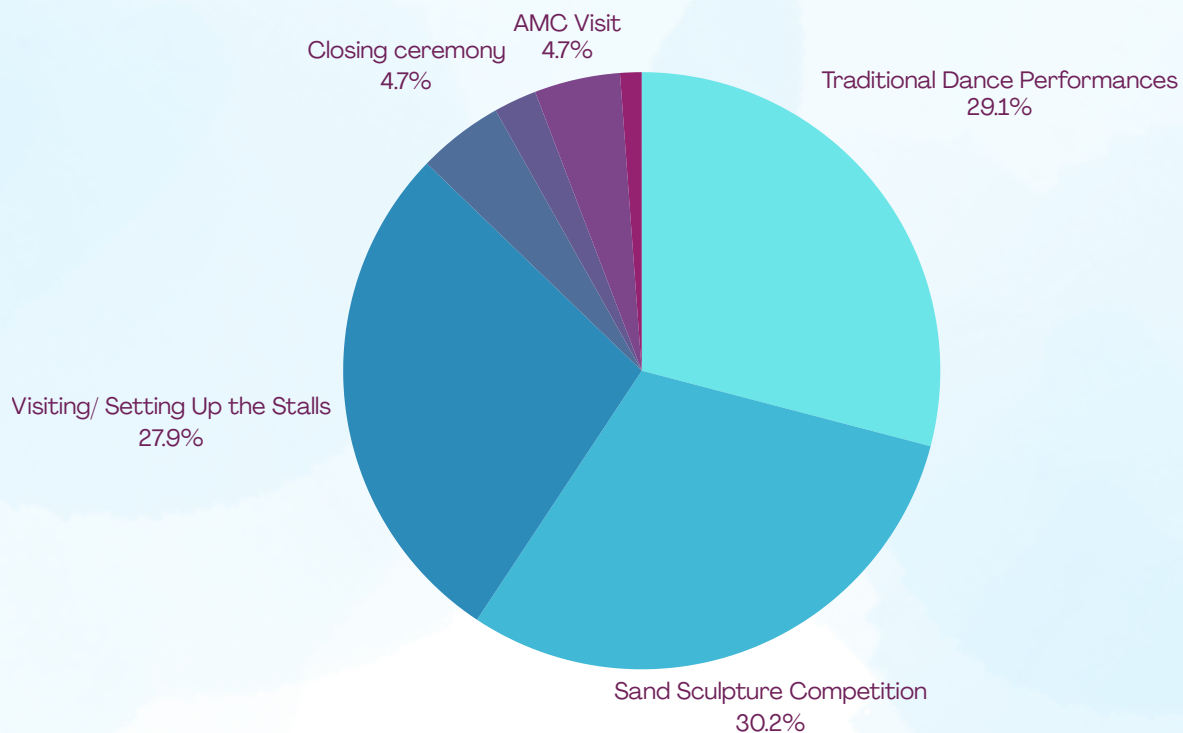
Moments like these highlight the festival's broader purpose—to create meaningful, experience-based learning opportunities that students carry forward, shaping their understanding of the ocean and empowering them to become active environmental stewards and ocean guardians.



Above: Lh. Atoll Education Centre's waste sculpture, with the inclusion of *Mobula alfredi*, a new species of manta ray which they learned about during one of AMC's outreach sessions at their school. Photo taken by I-Shutter.

There are several core elements that contribute to the continued success of the Lhaviyani Turtle Festival. Figure 5 highlights the activities and experiences that students reported enjoying the most, according to a feedback survey from 78 students and teachers.





**Figure 5.** Pie chart showing what aspect of the festival students enjoyed the most.

More detailed feedback about what students gained from the festival is provided below:

*“It inspired me to learn more of the marine life that lives in the ocean” - Student, Dhuvaafaaru Primary School.*

*“There were so many creative activities we could participate in and through it all, we got to raise awareness too” - Student from Afeefuddin School.*

*“I really enjoyed the turtle festival 2025. It was fun, lively, and such a cool way to raise awareness about turtles.” - Student from Lh. Atoll School.*

*“It inspired me to learn more of the marine life that lives in the ocean” - Student, Dhuvaafaaru Primary School.*

*“I enjoyed seeing the creativity of other schools, as well as meeting new people.” - Student from Lh. Atoll Education Center.*

*“Things were planned perfect” - Student from Afeefuddin School*

*“I got to experience something new to me, beautiful scenery and an amazing festival. Also got some information which I will surely benefit from” - Student, Afeefuddin School*

*“I got to see so many schools coming together and I loved the sessions taken. Very informative and interesting, especially if you’re a student who has a keen interest in marine science topics.” - Student from Lh. Atoll Education Center.*

*“It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate environmental awareness with students, colleagues, and the community. The atmosphere was vibrant, and I could see how much the children were learning and engaging with the activities.” – Teacher, Inguraidhoo School.*

*“It taught me a lot about what is happening in our environment and inspired me to take care of nature in my daily life. It also gave a platform for our students to showcase their creativity and love for the environment, making the festival both meaningful and enjoyable.” – Teacher, Lh. Atoll Education Center.*



Student feedback also revealed the educational impact of the festival. Many shared what they had learned about marine life and conservation, showing how the event successfully broadened their understanding of the ocean and its species.

A student from Lh. Atoll School shared their reflections on **“how much we need to protect our marine environment”**, while a student from Afeefuddin School said they got **“lots of exciting information about the wildlife all around the Maldives from the presentations”**, including new facts about **“endangered species”**. For example, a student from B. Atoll Education Center learned that **“there are different scales on sea turtle’s head”**, and another from Lh. Atoll School learned that **“a sea turtle can live for more than 50 years”**.

It was also encouraging to see shifts in attitudes towards certain behaviours. For example, one student from Afeefuddin School learned why **“keeping turtles as a pet isn’t a good thing to do”**. Others shared that they had become more aware of the dangers of ghost nets and plastic pollution, noting that they learned **“what threats ghost nets pose”** and **“how dangerous ghost net are”**. A student from Lh. Atoll Education Center also shared that **“us humans actually throw a lot of plastic in the ocean and that we are not supposed to do it”**.

Some standout feedback revealed the strong influence of the participating NGOs and organisations. The Miyaru Programme, in particular, left a notable impression—with at least seven students mentioning new facts about sharks, such as **“how important sharks are”**, **“the life span of sharks”**, **“different species”**, **“how long they’ve been in the world for”**, and **“what we should and shouldn’t do when getting close to sharks”**.

It was also evident how much influence other organisations such as Manta Trust had on the students. Several had commented on the new information they learnt about manta rays, including the **“different types of manta rays”** (B. Atoll Education Center student), and that **“each manta has their own identification”** (Lh. Atoll School student).

Perhaps most powerful, were the reflections from students who developed a sense of personal responsibility from these lessons. One student from Afeefuddin School said they learned **“how to protect marine life and how much it has already suffered”**, while another shared that **“we need more people in this country to take part in environmental and marine departments”**.

These lessons, from understanding marine species and ecosystems to recognizing their own role in protecting them, are at the heart of why this festival exists.



Above: Students listening to a sea turtle presentation by AMC’s Marine Biologist at turtle festival. Photo taken by AMC staff.



Above: Students participating in the sand sculpture competition. Photo taken by AMC staff.



## 11. FINANCE

**Table 6.** In-kind contributions from sponsors and partners.

Sponsor name	In-kind donation
Manta Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 complimentary seats between Velana International Airport and Madivaru Airport</li> <li>20 seats at 50% discounted rate between Velana International Airport and Madivaru Airport</li> </ul>
Robinson Club Noonu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-night stay 2 pax (Lucky Raffle Draw winner)</li> <li>3-night stay for 2 pax (Photography Competition winner)</li> <li>Return transport to Naifaru for Kudafaree School</li> </ul>
Dusit Thani Maldives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return transport to Naifaru for B. Atoll School</li> </ul>
Six Senses Kanuhura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return transport to Naifaru for Lh. Atoll School</li> </ul>
Le Meridien Resort & Spa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>480 cans of soft drinks</li> <li>1 nights stay for 2 pax, full board meal plan</li> </ul>
ARO Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>150 bottles of ARO water</li> </ul>
BeKind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-night stay in 2 villas for 5 pax (Lucky Raffle Draw competition winner)</li> </ul>
Soneva Fushi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return transport for B. Atoll Education Center</li> </ul>
Coca Cola	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>70 cans of soft drinks</li> </ul>
MIFCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return transport for Lh. Atoll Education Center</li> <li>Ice</li> </ul>
MV+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Six complimentary articles published</li> </ul>
Graphite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discounted printing services</li> </ul>
I-Shutter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free photography services</li> </ul>
Naifaru Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Symposium venue</li> <li>Accommodation for Kudafaree School</li> <li>Provided preparation materials</li> </ul>

**Table 7.** Turtle Festival expenses

Turtle Festival Arrangement	Cost (USD)
Printing (including flags, banners for all sponsors and partners, and festival t-shirts)	8226.5
Transport (including return flight from Velana International Airport to Madivaru Airport for NGO participants and Symposium Guest of Honour; speedboat pickup from Madivaru Airport to Naifaru; return ferry for Inguraidhoo School, Dhuvaafaru Primary School, Huhudhufaaruu School, and Meyna School; buggy pick-up from the harbour).	7363.77
Food & Refreshments (Breakfast, Lunch, and Supper for all Symposium Participants and staff; Breakfast and lunch for all local volunteers, entire staff team, chief guest, school students, student officials, and boat crew bringing school students on festival day.	6357.09
Festival / Symposium Venue Preparation (Including construction materials and labour costs for building main stage and stalls)	4229.93
Media & Entertainment (including media coverage, brand development, sound system, LED display panel for the symposium and festival main stage; contracted dance groups for traditional dance performances)	3654.67
Competition cash prizes	2306.67
Accommodation (Overnight stay for Afeefuddin School and Himandhoo School; daytime use accommodation for all other schools; overnight stay for Symposium Guest of Honour, and media partners.)	1948.33
Miscellaneous (including stationary, batteries, bouquets, welcome gifts, decorating materials)	557.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34,644.16</b>



**Table 8.** Income from sponsor donations.

Sponsor Name	Amount (USD)
Six Senses Kanuhara	5,000
Maldives Islamic Bank	2,200
Emerald Faarufushi Resort & Spa	2,200
Noku Maldives	2,200
Cora Cora Maldives	2,200
The Standard, Huruvahli Maldives	2,200
The Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	2,200
Atmosphere Kanifushi Maldives	1,400
Patina Maldives, Fari Islands	1,400
Trans Maldivian Airways	1,400
Reethi Faru Resort	1,400
Secret Paradise Maldives	1,000
Dhiraagu	1,000
Crossroads Maldives	1,000
<b>TOTAL (USD)</b>	<b>26,800</b>

## 12. CONCLUSION

The 2025 Lhaviyani Turtle Festival was, without doubt, the most impactful and far-reaching edition of the event to date. We were supported by more sponsors than ever before, filled the festival ground with our highest number of marine awareness stalls to date, and welcomed the highest number of schools in the history of Lhaviyani Turtle Festival. Since 2016, school participation has more than quadrupled, with students travelling from as far as North Ari and Haa Dhaalu Atoll. Each additional school represents dozens more students who gain access to meaningful learning, hands-on experiences, and exposure to environmental role models.

The continued rise in participation, combined with deeper community engagement, stronger collaborations, and expanding nationwide impact, shows that Lhaviyani Turtle Festival is not only thriving, but evolving into one of the most influential conservation education events in the Maldives. We can't wait to see how the festival continues to build momentum next year.

The full event was livestreamed on Atoll Marine Conservation Centre's YouTube Channel and are available to watch through the following links:

- [3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium](#)
- [Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025](#)



Above: Students participating in educational activities at AMC's festival stall. Photo taken by AMC staff.



Above: Festival ground during the Six Senses Kanuhura Lhaviyani Turtle Festival 2025. Photos taken by AMC staff.



## 12. APPENDIX

### Appendix 1. Symposium Schedule.



The graphic features a light blue background with stylized illustrations of marine life: a nautilus shell, two small fish, a large colorful sea turtle, and coral. At the top, there are four logos: Atoll Marine Conservation Centre, Six Senses Kanuhura, and the Maldives National University logo. The central text reads: \*LHAVIYANI\* TURTLE FEST, 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium, Currents of Connection: Communities, Culture & Conservation, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> September. Below this, the location and time are specified. The schedule is presented in two sections: a morning session (07:30AM - 09:00AM) and an afternoon session (09:00AM - 10:30AM). The afternoon session is titled 'Ecological Connectivity and Ocean Health' and includes six topics with their respective speakers.

**ATOLL MARINE CONSERVATION CENTRE**  
NAIFARU, MALDIVES

**SIX SENSES**  
KANUHURA

**\*LHAVIYANI\***  
**TURTLE FEST**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium**  
**Currents of Connection:**  
**Communities, Culture & Conservation**

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> September**

**Location:** Multi Purpose Building, Lh. Naifaru  
**Time:** Doors open 8:00 AM – Guests need to be signed in and seated by 8:30 AM  
**\*Tentative schedule**

**07:30AM - 08:30AM** **Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium: Currents of Connection: Communities, Culture & Conservation**  
*Breakfast served for participants.*

**08:30AM - 09:00AM** **Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium: Currents of Connection: Communities, Culture & Conservation**  
*Guest of Honour - Mr. Hassan Mohamed, Chief Executive — Environmental Regulatory Authority*

**Ecological Connectivity and Ocean Health**

**09:00AM - 09:15AM** **Automated Coral Health Assessment in the Maldives: Addressing Dataset Limitations**  
*Ismail Houd Rizvee, Founding Director of Technology & Research —Atolla*

**09:15AM - 09:30AM** **Seagrass - The Unsung Heroes of the Ocean**  
*James Cordery, Marine Biologist — Six Senses Kanuhura*

**9:30AM - 09:45AM** **Sea Turtles as Connectors: From Nesting Beaches to Ocean Ecosystems**  
*Adam Athif Mohamed, Sea Turtle Biologist — Atoll Marine Conservation*

**09:45AM - 10:00AM** **Biorock™ in the Maldives: Supporting Reefs and Ocean Health**  
*Agne Gričiute, Marine Biologist — Velaa Private Island*

**10:00AM - 10:15AM** **Ecosystem Linkages: Mangroves, Seagrasses, and Nutrient Dynamics**  
*Aishath Mufliha Ziyadh, Project Coordinator — Maldives Resilient Reefs*

**10:15AM - 10:30AM** **Tuna Tales: Reseach, sustainability and future of tuna fishries in the Maldives.**  
*Ahmed Riyaz Jauharee, Dean — Maldives National University*





## 3<sup>rd</sup> Atoll Marine Symposium Currents of Connection: Communities, Culture & Conservation

10:30AM - 10:45AM

BREAK

10:45AM - 11:30AM

PANEL DISCUSSION: Ecological Connectivity and Ocean Health

12:00PM - 2:00PM

LUNCH BREAK



### Solutions for Ocean Pollution

2:00PM - 2:15PM

**Turning the Tide: Community Solutions to Ocean Waste**

Shaffaf and Yasin Ziyad, Airport ambassador and tour guide — Secret Paradise

2:15PM - 2:30PM

**Blue Future: Youth-Driven Solutions to Ocean Pollution**

Mr. Mohamed Abdulla, Deputy Project Director — THE VIBE

2:30PM - 3:00PM

PANEL DISCUSSION: Solutions for Ocean Pollution

03:00PM - 03:30PM

PRAYER BREAK



### Communities and Youth in Conservation

3:30PM - 3:45PM

**Successes and Challenges of the Ranger Programme**

Ibrahim Inaan, Sea Turtle Ranger & Community Officer — Olive Ridley Project

03:45PM - 4:00PM

**The Spot On Project: Community-Driven Indo-Pacific Leopard Shark Conservation in the Maldives**

Hamna Hussain, Co-Founder and Outreach & Education Manager — Miyaru - Shark Programme

4:00PM - 4:15PM

**Laamaseelu Laamu**

Aishath Fithura, Community Engagement Coordinator — Maldives Underwater Initiative

04:15PM - 5:00PM

PANEL DISCUSSION: Communities and Youth in Conservation

5:00PM

CLOSING REMARKS AND REFRESHMENTS





## Appendix 2. Festival Day Schedule.







\*Tentative Schedule

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2025

TIME	Main Stage Area	Velaa Beach	Atoll Marine Centre
07:00 – 10:00		Stall Preparation	Closed
10:00 – 12:00	Conservation Presentations	Competition Judging	Doors open
12:00–13:00	LUNCH BREAK		
13:00	Opening ceremony & Guest of Honour Speech	Closed	Closed
13:30	Traditional Dance Competition	Stalls Open	Closed
14:00 – 15:00		Stalls Open	Doors open
15:00 – 15:30	PRAYER BREAK		
15:30 – 17:00	Conservation Presentations	Stalls Open	Doors open
16:00		Reconnecting Duo Arrival	Doors open
16:30		Sand Sculpture Competition	Doors open
17:00	Conservation Presentations		Doors open
17:15 – 18:00	AWARDS & CLOSING CEREMONY		

MAIN STAGE CONSERVATION PRESENTATIONS

10:00 Atolla: The use of AI in ecology  
10:15 Maldives Resilient Reefs: Masmahaaveshi module from their e-learning platform  
10:45 Maldives Ocean Plastics Alliance: Plastic Journey in the Maldives  
11:00 Maldives Manta Conservation Programme: Manta Ray Biology and Behaviour  
11:30 Olive Ridley Project: Citizen Science Programs  
11:45 Atoll Marine Centre: Why we need more Maldivians to protect our oceans  
15:30 Maldives National University: Marine Science opportunities in the Maldives  
17:00 Atoll Marine Centre: Sea Turtles and their challenges to survival