

REMOTE OPERATIONS

Working on a remote Maldivian island against a backdrop of pure white sand beaches, clear turquoise waters and luscious green swaying palms may be a dream to many, but for chefs, comes with its challenges. Discussing the operational difficulties of working miles away from regular food supplies, and how they overcome them, we hear from Cluster Executive Chef Christof Egli from Anantara Dhigu, Anantara Veli and Naladhu Private Island Maldives, and Executive Chef Christophe Wehrung from Niyama Private Islands Maldives.

By **SOPHIE VOELZING**



As a destination, the dreamlike Maldives speaks for itself through postcard-perfect imagery – no Photoshop required. Paired with world-class dining, schools of tropical

fish to swim with and colourful coral to see, it comes as no surprise that this destination is consistently one of the world's most frequented honeymoon destinations.

Abundant with luxury resort-only islands, which are drastically increasing in population by the year due to demand, the Maldives has become one of the world's most sought-after destinations to visit in recent years, with the influx of openings making it easier for visitors on all budgets to discover.

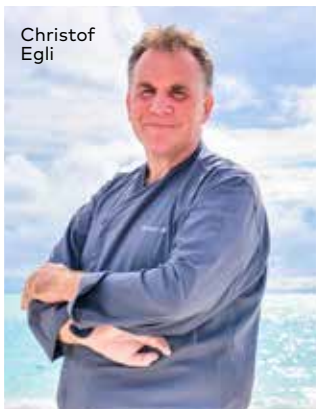
Accessible via speedboat and seaplane only, resorts in the Maldives welcome thousands of guests every week to indulge in nature's very own paradise, where they're able to enjoy luxurious, fine dining experiences paired with top-tier beverages and service.

To a guest, the Maldives is a once-in-a-lifetime sort of trip, but for a chef working from an isolated island with limited access to ingredients, it can be a challenge.

To learn more about remote operations and how a chef's role becomes so much more demanding by being based on an idyllic, yet distant island, we talk to Cluster Executive Chef Christof Egli from Anantara Dhigu, Anantara Veli and Naladhu Private Island Maldives, and Executive Chef Christophe Wehrung from Niyama Private Islands Maldives, to discover how they cope. Here's what they shared...

AS AN ISLAND RESORT, WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE AS A CHEF?

Christof Egli (CE): The biggest challenge is to ensure we have sufficient quantity for the delivery to ensure we don't run out of ingredients and fresh produce for our guests, because it can make things tricky if we run out of stock.



Christof Egli



Christophe Wehrung

“When we run out of certain ingredients, we have to try and organise for a fast-track delivery to be made from local suppliers, who will deliver via seaplane”

Christophe Wehrung (CW): We don't have access to fresh ingredients on hand and have to plan very carefully in advance when doing orders and menu engineering.

IS IT A DIFFICULTY SOURCING FRESH PRODUCE TO SUCH A REMOTE ISLAND?

CE: It is difficult and was a challenge to adjust to begin with. All of our ingredients and food products are brought in by boat from many countries. Everything is shipped into the capital of Male and then brought across by boats to our islands. I have to put in an order weekly according to our event forecasts and guest numbers. We try to use what we can from local sources, but it's very difficult as the Maldives is nearly all water and mostly sunny year-round.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU RUN OUT OF AN INGREDIENT?

CE: Well, the art of cooking is sometimes described as doing the best you can with what you have, which is sometimes what we

have to do. Other times, we have to reach out to our sister properties for assistance.

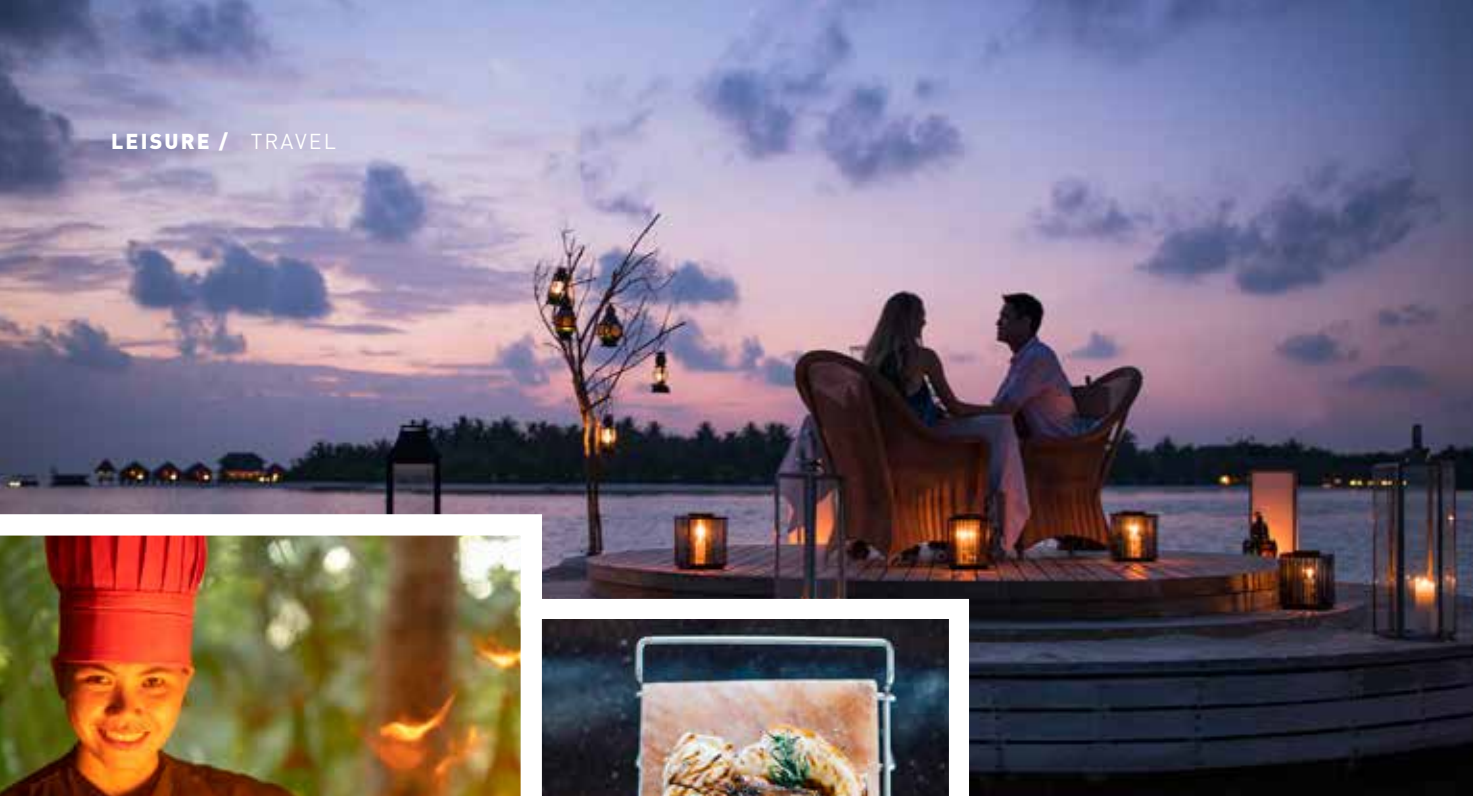
CW: When we run out of certain ingredients, we have to try and organise for a fast-track delivery to be made from local suppliers, who will deliver via seaplane. The only other alternative is to make temporary menu adjustments.

ARE GUESTS ABLE TO REQUEST SPECIFIC INGREDIENTS AHEAD OF TIME, SO THAT YOU CAN PRE-ORDER?

CE: Yes. At our resorts, it's all about personalisation and ensuring that all guests requirements are always met. So yes, guests are able to request for specific ingredients and if they are staying for a long time we can even get the produce for them during their stay upon request.

CW: Yes, this happens quite often.

AS AN ISLAND DESTINATION, HOW OFTEN DO YOU HAVE



WHAT LOCAL INGREDIENTS ARE YOU ABLE TO USE FROM NEIGHBOURING ISLANDS?

CE: Mainly papayas, and different melons from our neighbouring Island.

CW: Honestly, not much. We do however, use local fish and the coconuts from our island. We have also recently started our own herb garden.

TELL ABOUT THE LOCAL FISH YOU USE...

CE: We have daily delivery of fresh reef fish - mainly white snapper, grouper and my favourite, the red snapper. Our yellow fin tuna is excellent as well.

CW: From local Maldivian waters, we're able to source fish species such as red grouper, Jack fish, yellow fin tuna, and marlin, which are all available on our menus at Niyama.

TO IMPORT FRESH INGREDIENTS TO THE RESORT?

CE: Six times a week.

CW: Weekly.

ARE THERE COST IMPLICATIONS DUE TO THE IMPORTING?

CE: Yes, as a resort we are forced to increase our food prices, which I think most guests that visit Maldives understand. We're not trying to charge our guests too much, but we do have to account for import costs like fuel, customs, clearance charges, health certificates and more - it's an expensive process.

DOES IT AFFECT WHAT YOU'RE ABLE TO PUT ON YOUR MENUS?

CE: Not too much. As a 5-star resort we strive to provide our guests with everything they want, which sometimes means importing selected products in just for them.

WE LOVE THAT ANANTARA DHIGU FEATURES A CHEF'S GARDEN! TELL US ABOUT THE INGREDIENTS YOU GROW THERE...

CE: The chef's garden is very unique as given it is not easy to grow fresh produce in the Maldives. We grow coconuts, bananas, lemon grass, basil and some more herbs, which use in Baan Hurrah and Terrazzo restaurants.

VISIT

Niyama Private Islands Maldives:
niyama.com

Anantara Dhigu: anantara.com/en/dhigu-maldives

Anantara Veli: anantara.com/en/veli-maldives

Naladhu Private Island Maldives:
anantara.com/en/naladhu-maldives