

## **InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort Achieves Important Shark & Ray Area (ISRA) Status**



### **Following Ongoing Research in Partnership with The Manta Trust**

**August 2024...//** InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort's surrounding lagoon, Maamunagau and Fenfushi, has become an official Important Shark & Ray Area (ISRA). Following the resort's ongoing partnership with the Manta Trust, one of the world's leading manta ray research and conservation organisations, and the extensive research carried out by the on-site team, this new status grants the lagoon global recognition highlighting it as a critical habitat for manta rays and an area of conservation priority. This announcement follows years of scientific research and data, which has been supported by the resort, and is a step towards future protective measures to be implemented in the surrounding area to enforce conservation. This new announcement forms part of the Manta Trust's ongoing research to secure the area as a Marine Protected Area (MPA).

Alongside the lagoon of Maamunagau, additional sites in the surrounding area have been designated as ISRAS: Dhikkuredhoo & Madivaafaru (roughly 30 minutes from the resort and a spot for guests to snorkel with mantas, with chances to witness mass feeding events from June – November) and Vandhoo & Kottefaru (a popular diving location for guests and a favourite cleaning spot for resident mantas). Maamunagau and Fenfushi in particular have been identified as an important reproductive and feeding area for manta rays – holding regular and predictable aggregations of feeding reef manta rays from December – April and is recognised for its importance for young juvenile manta rays.

Recognising the unique privilege of occupying an island in such close proximity to a newly discovered juvenile reef manta ray feeding ground, InterContinental Maldives began working in collaboration with the Manta Trust in 2019. The area around InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort is home to a large and healthy population of reef manta rays which provides Manta Trust researchers based at the resort incredible access to study these animals. Sitting in its own natural lagoon on the idyllic Southernmost tip of Raa Atoll, on the edge of a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, which is home to Hanifaru Bay, a dedicated manta ray sanctuary, InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort supports the manta ray research around the lagoon and in other areas of Raa Atoll. The resort, which has its own sustainable waste initiatives and recycling programmes, prioritises educating guests on the importance of protecting these graceful creatures and offering the opportunity to swim alongside them. InterContinental Maldives also hosts annual 'Manta Retreats', allowing guests the chance to experience the magic of these gentle underwater giants – learning about the research taking place around them.

With pop up wellness practitioners, resident chefs and most recently, educational manta ray retreats, the resort plays host to a whole range of individuals, as well as a rich array of marine life. As the first and only all-Club InterContinental resort, guests are truly spoiled with indulgent complimentary benefits alongside luxurious five-star Maldivian facilities such as overwater villas, adults-only enclaves and a tranquil spa. With 81 beach, lagoon and over-water villas and residences, as well as six restaurants and bars, the resort enjoys the peace of a boutique hotel, but has the facilities of a world-class resort.

Jess Haines, PhD Researcher for The Manta Trust, comments "It's a wonderful achievement to see several areas in Raa Atoll designated as Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs). This milestone reflects the importance of the Manta Trust data collection efforts, which wouldn't have been possible without the support of the resort. I look forward to continue working with the data to produce exciting research papers through my PhD and work towards protecting these crucial marine habitats for young mantra rays."

*Rates start from USD 991 ++ in an Overwater Sunrise Pool villa incl. breakfast for two. For more information, please visit [www.maldives.intercontinental.com](http://www.maldives.intercontinental.com) or email [reservations.icmaldives@ihg.com](mailto:reservations.icmaldives@ihg.com).*

*For the full factsheets on these newly designated ISRAs are available here: <https://sharkrayareas.org/portfolio-item/maamunagau-fenfushi-isra/>.*

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## **Notes to Editors**

### **InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort**

InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort is an exclusive destination getaway offering a unique opportunity for those looking to unwind and reconnect in an enviable island setting where exclusive privileges go hand in hand with the personal touch of our signature service at InterContinental Hotels & Resorts' first and only all-Club InterContinental resort. Located in the Raa Atoll; 35 minutes by seaplane from the Velana International Airport, InterContinental Maldives is an award-winning island escape offering beach, lagoon, and overwater villas and residences with up to three bedrooms. Curated dining and wellness experiences, an extensive kids club as well as the Retreat, an adults-only enclave, along with a myriad of recreational adventures for families and couples alike are also available.

### **Manta Trust**

The Manta Trust is one of the world's leading manta ray research and conservation organisations. Using co-ordinated global research to aid conservation efforts surrounding manta rays, their relatives and their habitats, the Manta Trust aims to achieve global conservation through Research, Education and Collaboration.

Recognising the unique privilege of occupying an island in such close proximity to a newly discovered juvenile reef manta ray feeding ground, InterContinental Maldives began working in collaboration with the Manta Trust in 2019. The area around InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort is home to a large and healthy population of reef manta rays which provides Manta Trust researchers based at the resort incredible access to study these animals.

Reef manta rays are listed as “vulnerable” and oceanic manta rays as “endangered” on the IUCN Red List. The work we do here helps to increase knowledge and understanding, which can be used to guide conservation measures both here in the Maldives but also around the world where manta populations are much smaller, and often threatened. Our team of Manta Trust researchers welcome our guests to join them for educational presentations and sustainably ran excursions.

### **ISRAS**

An Important Shark and Ray Area (ISRA) is a specific, three-dimensional habitat essential for one or more shark or ray species, identified through a rigorous, evidence-based process independent of political influence. Unlike Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which enforce regulations to mitigate human impact, ISRAs highlight crucial areas for potential conservation, aiming to draw attention to their importance and advocate for appropriate management measures. The ISRA process integrates scientific data and expert knowledge to map these vital habitats, supporting a systematic approach to the conservation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras globally.

**Vision:** Enhance shark, ray, and chimaera conservation through systematic ISRA identification.

**Mission:** Mobilize global research to identify and map ISRAs, providing actionable insights for effective conservation.