

RISING STAR



Najih Hussain is an enthusiastic young diver with a passion for underwater photography and videography. He has worked in 9 different resorts and some live-aboard safaris as a dive instructor, done 7500 to 8000 dives and made over 420 certifications. He is currently the Dive Team leader of Scupaspa Safari Boat.

NAJIH HUSSAIN

DIVE TEAM LEADER
SCUBASPA SAFARI

Walk me through a day in your life? What is the best part of the job?

Work is work, but one should be passionate about their work. I am always ready to go for a dive. I love to teach courses and train people to love the ocean like I do. I like to interact with people, and make sure the dive experience with me is memorable. Being a dive instructor is not just about going diving. It involves maintaining a clean dive centre, equipment, paperwork, attending demands of guests, and educating them about marine life. Since I am currently working on a liveaboard, I usually wake up at 05:30am and get prepared for the morning dive briefing at 06:15am. After the first dive, we have breakfast and, at around 10:30, we go back in the water.

When we are back we have lunch, and at 14:30 we dive again. Sometimes, we also plan sunset dives or night dives. The work is intense, but you adjust yourself to the flow, and get tasks done. You need to be proactive to be on top of things and constantly analyze the atmosphere and take care of logistics. Time management is important. 15 mins wasted here is 15 mins you lose elsewhere. In between I support my Cruise Manager with several tasks and have discussions with my dive team and management. Scubaspa is a concept which involves 2, 50m luxury liveaboards which look exactly the same. The boat has 27 designated staff. Working in resorts and liveaboards are very different. I have worked in 9 different resorts in Maldives and also in a few local islands. I like to dive in different areas of the Maldives, and also explore new sites. Recently, my colleagues and I have discovered a few new dive sites in West Huvadhoo.

What has been your most memorable dive experience from the hospitality industry so far?

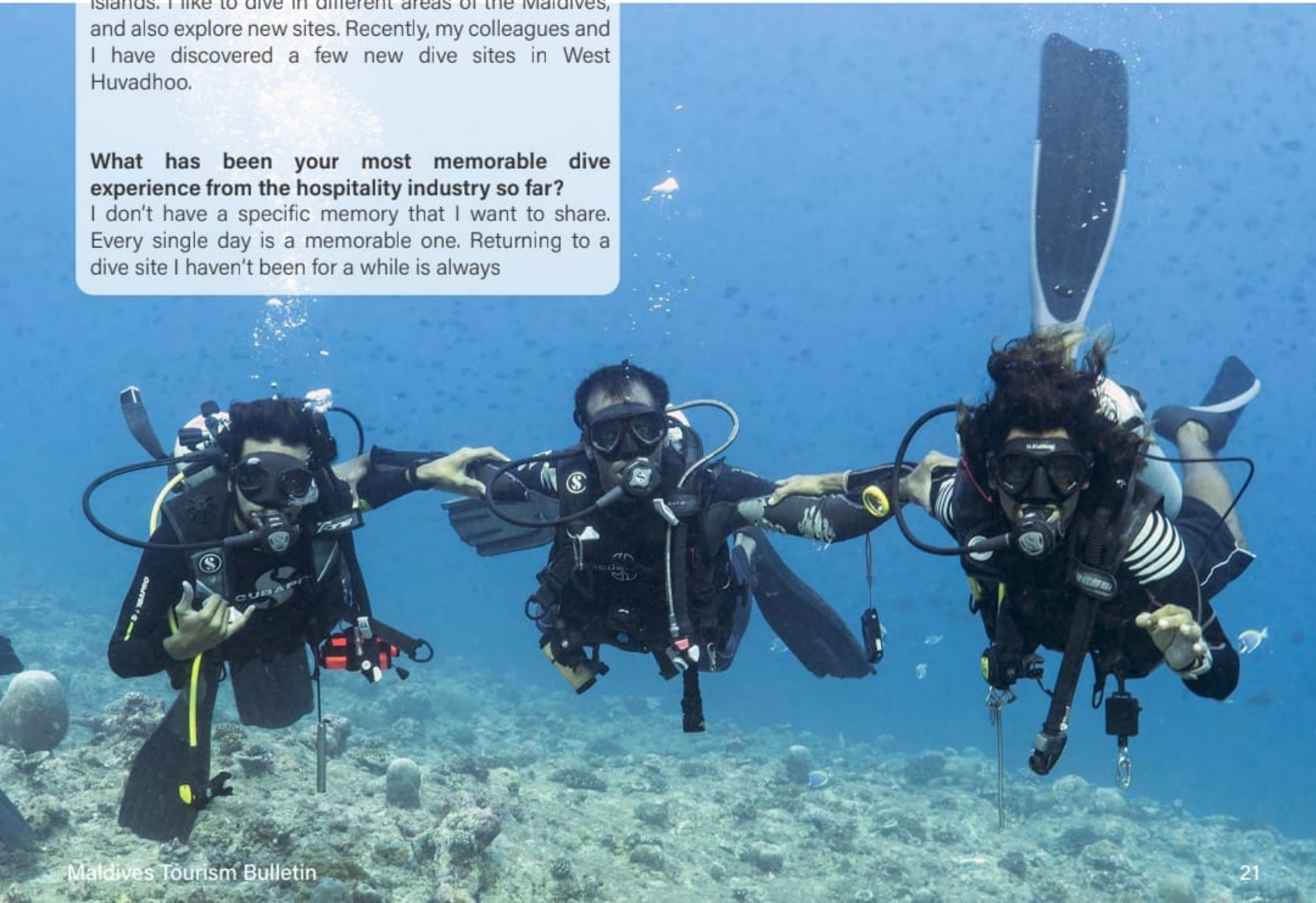
I don't have a specific memory that I want to share. Every single day is a memorable one. Returning to a dive site I haven't been for a while is always

mesmerizing. I also like fast channel currents. But that means extra precautions for the guest's safety. I like to sit alone after the day, for at least 5 mins, to analyze what I have done and how I could improve certain things. Every day is a learning day. As an enthusiastic young professional, how would you describe the diving industry of the Maldives? Would you recommend diving as a career profession?

The diving industry is growing fast. The way the Maldivian society looks at diving as a reputable career path, and at divers in general, have changed over the past 7 years. Diving as a profession used to be considered a job for people without education and no personality. The numbers of dive masters and instructors are increasing fast today. It's rewarding, but you should also be prepared to work hard for it.

Are you enjoying safari life? What do you like most about tourism industry?

Yes, I enjoy working on liveaboards. On the boat, my colleagues and I get to spend a lot of time with the guests, because we see them more often than in a resort. We share a lot of ideas and stories and we collect feedback on where to improve listening to their needs and demands. The dive sites we explore with the guests are mostly the best ones of any atoll. I enjoy meeting and getting to know new people from all over the world, who also are interested in learning more about the ocean and diving.





As a diver your aim should always be to leave only bubbles. You don't need to touch anything, or chase any marine life.

Tell us about your hospitality journey

I started working after I finished my A'Levels, as I intended to have a break and save some money in order to go for further studies to a university abroad. At that time, I didn't have a clear idea about my career path, however, I started my first job at Kuramathi Resort as an excursion guide in 2013. Back then I didn't know how to properly snorkel and I had never seen the structures of a reef when I accompanied some guest with the resort's Marine Biologist, for a snorkeling excursion.

This was the first time for me and although I knew how to swim, my colleagues were a bit concerned looking at my movements in the water. My manager was not pleased to hear that I was not able to snorkel, and my colleague, Mr. Ahmed Mohamed, took his time to teach me in the early mornings, before we started work of breakfast. Eventually, within a week, I managed to learn how to snorkel and assist guests.

Who and what inspired you to start a career in diving?

During those months in Kuramathi, I got close to a few dive staff on the island. The Dive Centre was somewhat a busy place, so I started to get more curious about the ocean. Day by day I gathered more information, that I passed to the guests, and realized that my curiosity had led me to a point where I wanted to become a dive instructor. As this opportunity was not available for me in Kuramathi, I applied to Villa Marine Centre to become a divemaster, but 2 months passed and there were not even enough candidates for them to start the course.

How long did it take you to become certified?

Thanks to my parents and their upbringing, I did not spend money on useless items. After 6 months of work at Kuramathi I had saved US\$ 6000/-. I really wanted to become a divemaster, I wanted it badly. So, I decided to take a trip out of the Maldives. My parents didn't like the idea as they never expected me to take such a career path.

Anyhow, after lots of self-research, in the 2nd quarter of 2014, I decided to go to Thailand. I was determined to become a professional diver. So, headed out on my own mission. My first 120 dives were within the Gulf of Thailand, in Koh Tao, where I joined at Ban's Diver Resort. I stayed on the island 100 days to become a divemaster. I had managed to get special permission from the dive center allowing me to stay long without having visa issues.

Tell us about your first scuba diving experience?

My first pool session was a bit crowded, there were 12 students in my open water course, with 2 instructors. After the pool session we went out for the first dive. I remember that I was concerned removing the mask, as I use contact lenses. I had a fear that if I took my mask off, my contacts would get lost in the water, and my vision would be blinded. Also, closing my eyes was a bit scary, as I was not used to being in the water without a mask growing up. After some encouragement from my British dive instructor, Liz, I managed to take off my mask and gain confidence.

During my divemaster course, I met a lot of people, backpackers and small retail shop handlers. Everyday was about diving, and my passion could only grow stronger. Meeting experienced dive instructors from different parts of the world allowed me to learn from a lot of stories and different ideas. After successfully becoming a divemaster, I returned to the Maldives, applied for a few jobs at different resorts, and managed to get my first employment as a divemaster in Conrad Hilton. Today I am a PADI Staff Instructor plus SSI Divemaster instructor along with a wide range of specialties that I can teach. Currently working on Scubaspa floating resort, as Dive Team Leader.



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The tourism industry in Maldives is also developing very fast, a lot of new boats, new resorts, new guest houses opening every year. At this point, most importantly we need to maintain our quality. Instead of putting foreigners at our front doors we need to train Maldivians. Tourism in Maldives is undoubtedly the highest source of income. We need passionate locals to expand the economy.

Are you passionate about conservation? Share your thoughts

Yes. of course, I am passionate about conservation. Over the years people in Maldives have become more aware about marine conservation and protection. Although we still need to focus more on spreading awareness. It saddens me to hear about shark finning and catching turtles for greedy, temporary benefits for a few individuals only in the society.

My advice to people who care about our environment and preservation of Maldivian marine ecology is to avoid getting involved in any activities, even if they see someone doing it. But rather make them understand the importance of conservation. I have personally worked in restoration of reefs, such as coral planting events in different resorts. This is a good way to involve and gather guests and staff for an important purpose. As a diver your aim should always be to leave only bubbles. You don't need to touch anything, or chase any marine life.

What would be your advice to young locals entering the tourism industry?

It's very important how you present yourself. Your personality and attitude are very important for self-development. Also, analyze yourself. Don't do a job just for the sake of doing it. Do it because you love it. Working an extra mile is how you can stand out from the rest.

What's the biggest lesson you've learnt as a diver?

Being a diver, even for a not professional level, is for anyone medically fit. It's not a dangerous sport, like some people still describes. Of course, you have risks. But it is extremely safe if you stay within your limits and training. Being confident is important, but it's also important to refrain from being over confident. Learn new things every day, even the name of a fish. That's how you grow.

What are your future plans?

Dreams can go very far. I have managed to achieve some of my goals since I started working on them. I am on the same track to achieve the rest of my goals in my career. Right now I am planning to build a dive center with my own concept.