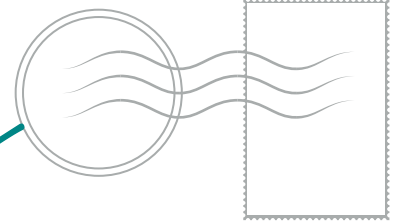


POSTCARD

The Maldives



Giving back to planet Earth is as rewarding as it is enjoyable, finds **Robin Murray**

"We're hopeful this process will make our reef healthier and happier," says Siyam World's marine biologist Mariyam Thuhufa as we carefully attach our revitalised coral pieces to the metal structure.

We're taking part in a coral planting experience at Siyam World, a Maldivian resort that prides itself on its plethora of ocean-based activities. With interest in conservation tourism skyrocketing, experiences like this are an easy way to incorporate environmental activities into a classic Maldivian getaway.

Mariyam tells us coral reefs are among the planet's most valuable ecosystems. These bustling little cities – where sea creatures and plants find shelter, food and partners to mate with – support fishing and tourism, protect the shoreline and help mitigate climate change.

But, she goes on to say, they are in danger. Overfishing and warming oceans are putting reefs across the world at risk, which is why I am on the shoreline of Siyam World's exclusive island, helping out with the restoration project.

Shortly before I arrived, Mariyam had dived down to the reef to collect damaged coral, which I am now rehabilitating by scrubbing and attaching it to a metal structure with cable ties. It's a therapeutic process, and with the help of Mariyam, who shares information about the different kinds of coral as I work away, I soon discover that each variety has its own unique characteristics.

Once each piece of coral has been securely fastened, Mariyam puts her fins back on and takes the structure to the end of the jetty, diving back into the reef to carefully place it on the bed. To my joy, she resurfaces with a beaming smile on her face and says: "A clownfish started nibbling away at the coral as soon as I put it down." It will take about three years until the frame is completely covered by coral colonies.

Siyam World is packed with activities for all ages, but if you have clients who are looking to do something a little different, this should be at the top of their list. **TW**



BOOK IT

If Only sells a seven-night all-inclusive stay in a Water Villa with Pool and Slide from £2,959 per person (based on two sharing). Includes flights departing June 4, return seaplane transfers and a 25% discount when booked by May 15. Snorkelling with the marine biologist is included, but the coral frame experience comes with an extra charge. ifonly.net



FROM TOP: Marking International Biological Diversity Day with a beach clean-up; a frame is positioned in the coral reef

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Mikhail Grachikov