



The Story of the First Aquarium-Style Undersea Restaurant in the World...

Mr. Ahmed Saleem, one of the Hilton Maldives Resort & Spa's owners, came up with the idea of building an undersea restaurant in 2001 when he was in Bali, having seen a room built into the side of a hill facing a river. Four years later, his dream became a reality, when on 15th April; Ithaa Undersea restaurant opened its doors to the first diners.

In the Maldivian language of Divehi, "ithaa" means "pearl" and the restaurant Ithaa sits like a pearl beneath the waves, between the lagoon and a vibrant coral reef.

Mr. Saleem researched all around the world for the perfect person who will be able to design and build this unique restaurant and he found him in Auckland, New Zealand. Mike Murphy, an aquarium technology specialist with M J Murphy Ltd, worked with Mr Saleem on the entire structural design, adding his expertise on underwater structures and his passion for marine biology & sea life.

Ithaa consists of 3 x 5-metre wide x 125mm thick acrylic arches sitting one meter below the sea level during low tide and almost two meters at high tide. These arches are the widest yet constructed underwater in the world. The acrylic arch sections are sealed to each other and the structure with a special underwater silicone sealant and the steel structure is protected by a special high quality marine paint system and a series of zinc anodes. The inside of the restaurant is 9 metres long and 5 metres wide.

The structural timber comes from New Zealand treated pine and the outside and inside lining is western red cedar wood from Canada, while the acrylic comes from Colorado, USA. Ithaa was built in Singapore over five weeks. The structure was shipped from Singapore in one piece on a barge with a crane on board to lower it into the sea. The journey to Rangali Island from Singapore took 16 days. The resort's main entrance channel had to be made deeper in order to allow the barge with the crane to pass through into the lagoon. The sand dredged up by cutting the channel was moved to the island's beaches.

The structure is supported on four 750mm diameter steel piles (concrete filled), which were driven into the seabed. This method was selected to minimize the damage to the already existing reef. The piles were driven in from a barge mounted vibro-hammer. The sinking of the structure took 13 hours from 07.00 to 20.00 on November 20, 2004.

The restaurant's total weight, when it was lowered to sea was 175 tones with 85 more tons of sand having to be placed inside the belly of the structure to sink it into the sea. The total cost of building this restaurant was about US \$5 million.

A top quality air-conditioning system was absolutely crucial for this restaurant. This was designed by a New Zealand firm Jackson Engineering to provide fresh air, cooling and to control humidity. The system provides 3 air changes per hour at a humidity level of 60%.



The safety of the guests has been designed to very stringent standards. All access areas are fire proof to provide 3 hour fire rating. Access areas have sprinkler system where the water supply and pressurizing system is independent of the resort services.

The table settings consist of the finest quality items: Dudson Element Air show plates and side plates; white Frette napkins; WMF Taika cutlery; 4-salt selection in a wooden container custom built for Ithaa; Champagne & Wine glasses by Riedel Vinum Extreme range; and additional chinaware by Rosenthal.

Such a unique restaurant deserves a distinctive cuisine, which is why the theme is 'contemporary Maldivian cuisine', taking local spices, seasonings and traditional cooking methods, but adding a western twist to create an innovative style of cooking. Ithaa is the first and only restaurant in the world to offer fusion Maldivian cuisine. The menu offers an extensive exploration of local foods, often in bite-sized portions across four courses to allow diners the opportunity to discover and experience the knowledgeable combination of flavours and textures. While the cuisine is dedicated to the fine balance of western food items with a Maldivian flavour, the wine concept is equally exciting; offering diners the perfect opportunity to discover the wines of the prestigious Champagne house Louis Roederer.

There is one other underwater restaurant, in Eilat, Israel, while there are several others marketed as being 'underwater' (Dubai, Caribbean) when in fact they are surrounded by an aquarium and are not in open water. Ithaa is the world's first aquarium-style undersea restaurant - truly affording diners stunning views of the surrounding reefs and fish life.

Enjoy the Culinary Journey and our Ultimate Dining Experience under the Sea !