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CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
SIX SENSES RESORTS & SPAS



Three Six Senses properties were in the affected regions: Soneva Fushi and Soneva Gili resorts in the Maldives, and Evason Phuket resort in Thailand. All have spas.

Thankfully, there was no loss of life or serious injuries. Soneva Fushi and Evason Phuket were virtually untouched and remain fully operational. Evason Phuket had to install a pontoon jetty on 28 December to re-establish access to its popular private beach on Bon Island. As a result of this low period, the Sundeck Wing of Evason rooms is being converted and upgraded to 16 duplex suites.

Soneva Fushi business is rebounding strongly, with February occupancy at 75 per cent and March closing at more than the forecasted 79 per cent. During January, work on the new private spa suites was completed, and we opened the 'Jungle Reserve', which features a private massage pavilion and a tree-house. Soneva Gili, which is built entirely over water, sustained some light structural damage and was evacuated following the tsunami. It will reopen in May, and this time is being used to complete the 'Private Reserve', a 1,400sq m over-water complex, featuring its own spa suite and gym.

There was no warning about what was to happen – the hardest part was wondering whether it would stop at waist level or keep



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going. Some hotels were better off than ours, some worse. In our Maldives properties, this often depended on the location of the reef and the position of surrounding islands.

Many local islands were affected much more seriously than the tourist resorts. There is some serious work to be done to get people back on their feet. The emergency relief organisations are working hard but there will still be much to do in the long term. This is one of the primary reasons Soneva Resorts has set up a relief fund, with at least 60 per cent of funds reserved for longer-term projects.

The tourism boards are working hard to ensure a balanced view gets across. One of the key points they've tried to highlight is that visiting Thailand and the Maldives is the best thing people can do. If they don't, this natural disaster will turn into an economic crisis.

ANDREW JONES

GUARDIAN, SANCTUARY RESORTS, THAILAND

We have two properties in Thailand: the Racha resort on Racha Island, which is 35 minutes by speedboat south of Phuket, and La Flora, in Khao Lak, 50 minutes north of Phuket airport.

The Racha was hit by the tsunami and suffered some structural damage, mainly to the public areas such as the reception, coffee shop, lounge bar, beach restaurant and dive centre. Being on high ground, most of the villas were not affected by the waves. There was no loss of life and no major casualties at the resort.

Unfortunately, La Flora, being right on the beach, took a direct hit and suffered not only structural damage – 14 of our staff and at least six guests perished. Some guests are still missing.

One of the main effects was on the families of the staff we lost in Khao Lak. We are taking steps to look after them



now. For example, the general manager, Mark Heather, has arranged a scholarship for the son of the food and beverage manager who perished. We've agreed with the owners of the Thai properties that although

they are closed, the staff will be kept on during the reconstruction period.

Both resorts are now closed and rebuilding is underway. It's estimated the resorts will reopen in six to eight months' time, although La Flora may take a little longer – 12 beach villas and the spa and wellness area were washed away, and the water reached the top of the second floor of both three-storey main buildings. As a lot of damage was sustained, the challenge will be to find materials and workmen to complete the renovations in good time.

Although our resorts are closed, we are encouraging tourists to return to Thailand, particularly Phuket, as local people still need to earn a living. Many of

the areas around Phuket were not touched by the tsunami and you would never know that it had hit the area.

I believe Thailand will recover quite quickly: the beautiful scenery is still there, the people are as friendly and hospitable as ever, and it's still a great place to refresh and rejuvenate. These people and their communities need our support if they are to keep the economy buoyant.

More than ever we see that many communities in Asia need responsible and sustainable tourism projects in order to support themselves. Although we grieve for the people who lost their lives, the outpouring of support and financial assistance from guests, previous guests and friends has been heartwarming. Due to these offerings, we're setting up a charitable foundation, initially for the children of staff members who lost their lives. As funds permit, facilities will be provided for tourism-related vocational training for young people.