

Being a physician for some time at the Maldives

TEXT: Christine Bellmann

My arms are still sore from carrying around the movement boxes, so much that I was thinking about the last few weeks. Many things just happened. I passed the final examination, I had a nice prom and I moved out of the apartment I shared with a colleague and stored my belongings. I started realizing that I actually made it, „I am a dentist“! And there I was, sitting at Düsseldorf airport, freezing (as it is December I am talking about) and waiting for my flight to Male (Maldives). How did I get there? Well, long story short: I was asked to help out

at a medical center at the Maldives as a medical consultant. I had no idea what to expect or what my job would look like. The flight was quite nice and I arrived in Male, the capital of the Maldives, in the morning. The sun was shining and I was so looking forward to finally reach the island and meet my colleagues, two German doctors highly qualified for emergency medicine and diving sickness.

After another few hours I reached the island and was amazed by the blue water, the sand and the sunshine. I





never saw anything like it. It really looks like it was pictured on postcards. The medical center I was supposed to work at is located on a small island with only a luxury hotel on it and a few buildings for staff accommodation. Even with me being so tired after the long

trip, I was not able to go to bed right away, as there were just too many new things to explore. During the next three months I treated patients with all kinds of medical problems. Our patients were staff from the hotel or hotel guests. So, during my time working as an assisting



hotel doctor, I explored what it is like to be called in the middle of the night to see guests in their rooms because they had major sunburns or an upset stomach. Decompression sickness affects divers because during their dive they inhale gas that is at higher pressure than the surface pressure. Especially if divers stay underwater for extended periods or dive deep without ascending gradually with certain decompression stops, the risk of getting a diving sickness increases. The most common symptoms are paresthesia, pain or marbled skin. We treated the patients with diving sickness with decompression.

In the cases I was not sure, I just called my colleague, who was a very well-trained and experienced German emergency and dive doctor. Together we also treated some more severe medical problems. So, I was able to see and learn a lot in this short time. It also happened once or twice that my colleague called me to come to the medical center to see a patient with dental problems, mostly local staff. Because there was not much dental equipment around, there was not much I could do besides extracting teeth.

A lot of patients were Maldivians, as most of the hotel staff were local people. They are very thankful people in

general, and especially the women were thankful that a female doctor was available on the island. But not just them, also the hotel guests are thankful to have well-trained doctors available at such a remote destination. Like all over the world, I met friendly patients as well as some bullheads and smarty-pants. I guess, everyone knows what I am talking about...

So in the end, this was quite a nice experience for me. I met so many new people, explored a new county and made some new friends. It was nice to see the bigger picture before starting my first job as a dentist in Germany. Now I know for sure that there is a world beside dentistry!

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Christine studied dentistry in Dresden, Germany, and graduated in 2009. After her trip she started working in Ettlingen (near Karlsruhe, Germany) in a dental office. She is the treasurer of Young Dentists Germany (BdZA) and engaged in a closer cooperation of dentistry and medicine.

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