



Restoration of the Eid Mosque, Male', Maldives

The 18th century Eid Mosque is the most finely carved of the four coral mosques in Male', the capital of the Maldives. The unique features of the mosque, probably built on the site of an ancient Buddhist temple, reflect the history and geology of the Indian Ocean archipelago.

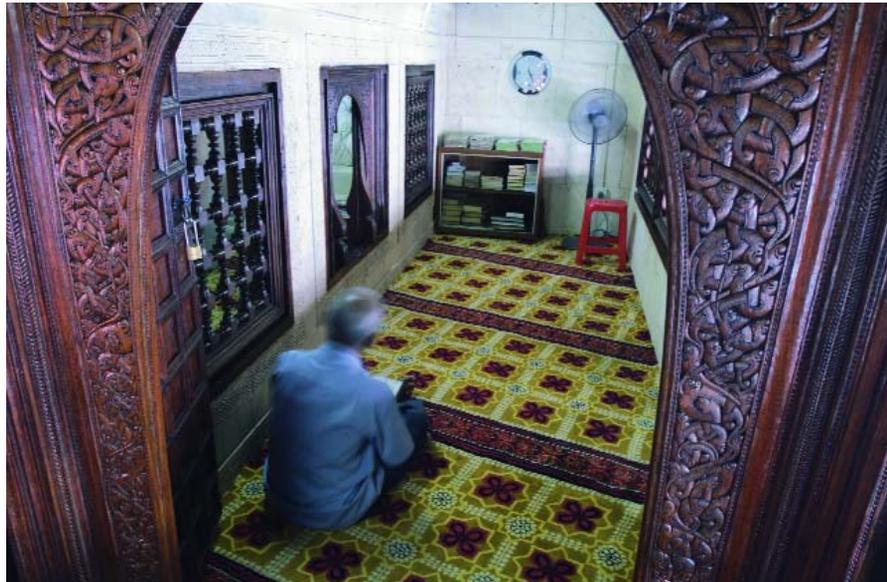
The Maldives officially converted to Islam in 1153, having previously been Vajrayana Buddhist. The Eid Mosque does not face Mecca directly, but follows the alignment of its probable predecessor temple. Lined carpet inside the mosque shows devotees the correct direction in which to pray.

Early mosque designs in the Maldives echoed the temple designs of India and Sri Lanka, and it was not until the 19th century that people were able to travel easily to Mecca and bring back more classical designs. The Eid Mosque represents the older style, in strong contrast to more modern places of worship in Male'.

Blocks of coral were used relatively commonly for construction of prestigious buildings in the Maldives. Although soft when first taken from the sea, the stone quickly hardens as it dries, making the carvings durable. Along with intricate geometric patterns, a lock and key device features prominently on the mosque's carved exterior, possibly symbolizing Islam as the key to paradise. The windows and door frames are made of finely carved wood, with verses from the Quran forming intricate lacquer decorations on the ceiling.

Coral mining has been in decline in the Maldives since a partial ban in 1999, and with no remaining crafts people skilled in the art of coral carving, the Eid Mosque was seriously deteriorating due to lack of maintenance and abuse from the elements before it was damaged further by the December 2004 tsunami.

The Mosque was restored with a grant from the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation in 2005. The main work was to clean dirt and pollution from the coral surfaces.



The woodwork had been badly damaged by insects, and had to be restored and re-lacquered. Recent tile work in the forecourt was separated from the walls to prevent contamination of the coral, but the forecourt and surrounding walls were left in place to accommodate a modern congregation that cannot fit into the tiny mosque.