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# Sonu Shivdasani



Born in England, and mostly educated there, he also spent some time studying in Nigeria and Switzerland. He is an alumnus of Eton College and a graduate of Oxford University, where he earned an MA in English Literature. During his time at Oxford, Sonu met his Swedish-born wife, Eva. They fell in love with the Maldives and leased an island there in 1990. After some effort and considerable good luck, their first resort, Soneva Fushi, opened in 1995. As a pioneer for luxury and environmental responsibility, Soneva Fushi redefined tourism in the Maldives and soon became known as the country's premier island destination.

After Soneva Fushi welcomed its first guests, Sonu and Eva launched Evason hotels in 1997 with properties across Southeast Asia and Europe, followed by Six Senses Resorts & Spas in 2004. By 2011, Six Senses had become a globally recognised luxury spa and resorts chain, with 15 resorts open and many under development, as well as 41 operating spas. Six Senses was sold in 2012. In October 2024, Sonu stepped down from the day-to-day running of Soneva. Sonu and Eva are now focusing on the next chapter of their life, which includes a brand inspired by Japanese values.

In addition to the development of Soneva and Six Senses, Sonu has pioneered greater environmental accountability within the hospitality sector and beyond. In 2010, the Sonu & Eva Shivdasani Foundation was created as a means to reinforce Soneva's SLOWLIFE core purpose. Sonu believes strongly that companies must play their part in addressing the problems of the 21st century. This is possible through small changes that do not affect a company's profitability - in fact, these changes can positively impact a brand's image while raising considerable capital for good causes. Much of the funding for the not-for-profit Sonu & Eva Shivdasani Foundation comes from this strategy. Since Soneva banned branded bottled water across its resorts in 2010, instead filtering, mineralising and bottling its own water on site, the resultant financial savings have supported clean water projects worldwide. After developing a carbon calculator to measure Soneva's direct and indirect CO2 emissions and external emissions such as guest flights and environmental profit and loss along the company's supply chain, Sonu introduced a mandatory carbon levy on all guest stays to offset this. This levy has funded the construction of a 1.5-megawatt windmill in India, the planting of more than three million trees in Thailand, Mozambique, Nepal and the Philippines, and the distribution of energy-efficient cookstoves to rural communities in Myanmar that has benefitted over 270,000 people till date.

In 2008, Sonu hosted the first of the SLOWLIFE Symposium event series, bringing together some of the world's most impressive environmentalists to problem-solve the greatest environmental challenges. In 2016, Soneva Fushi hosted the Soneva Dialogue, a meeting between the CEOs of the world's largest fishing companies to agree on common targets and set standards for ocean stewardship. The dialogue directly led to the formation of SeaBOS, a unique collaboration between scientists and seafood companies across the wild capture, aquaculture and feed production sectors, seeking a global transformation towards sustainable seafood production and healthy oceans.

In 2019, Sonu convened the island council presidents of three local communities, along with senior government officials, to launch Soneva Namoonaa, Soneva's flagship project that reimagines waste management in the Maldives. Namoonaa means 'exemplary' in Dhivehi, the language of the Maldives, and the project models sustainable waste management and radical single-use plastic reduction. Since the launch of the project, the model has been adopted across the whole of Baa Atoll and the Maldives' government has announced strategies to phase

out single-use plastics.

In 2018, Sonu faced a life-altering diagnosis of Stage IV Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The experience became the catalyst for a pioneering approach to wellness that blended conventional medicine with natural therapies and alternative treatments. This also led to the launch of the Soneva Soul wellness brand in 2021.

Having championed greater environmental accountability in the hospitality sector for more than two decades, Sonu was honoured as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to tourism, sustainability and charity in the King's New Year Honours 2023 Overseas and International List. The same year, he was crowned the recipient of the prestigious SevenRooms Icon Award at the inaugural World's 50 Best Hotels 2023 - the only award given to an individual and not a hotel property.

As the former Joint Creative Director of Soneva, Sonu is passionate about design, art, and architecture. Travel, food and wine, and learning more about wellness are a vocation for Sonu.