



MALDIVES

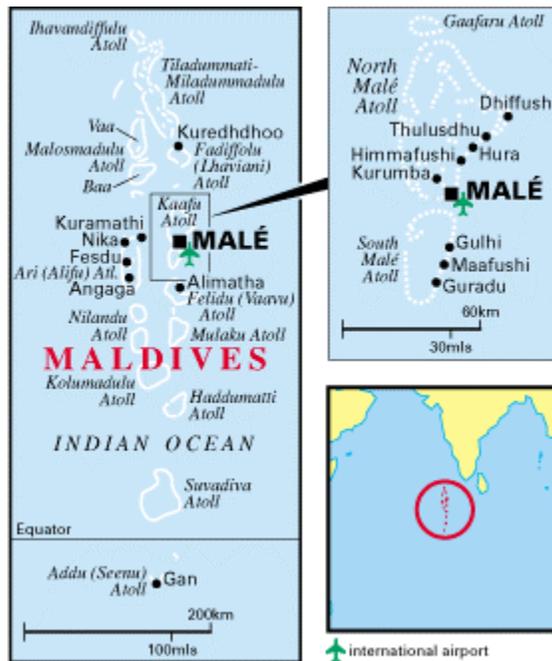


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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: A group of islands in the Indian Ocean, 500km (300 miles) southwest of the southern tip of India.

Maldives Tourism Promotion Board
4th Floor, Bank of Maldives Building, Malé 20-05, Bodudhakurufanu, Matu, Maldives Republic
Tel: 323 228. Fax: 323 229.
E-mail: mtbp@visitmaldives.com or info@visitmaldives.com
Web site: <http://www.visitmaldives.com>

Maldives High Commission
22 Nottingham Place, London W1M 3FB
Tel: (020) 7224 2135. Fax: (020) 7224 2157.
E-mail: maldives.high.commission@virgin.net
Opening hours: 0930-1730 Monday to Friday.

Note: The British High Commission in Colombo deals with enquiries relating to the Maldives (see Sri Lanka section).

Maldives Mission to the United Nations
Suite 400E, 800 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017
Tel: (212) 599 6195. Fax: (212) 661 6405. E-mail: mdvun@undp.org

Note: The US Embassy in Colombo deals with enquiries relating to the Maldives (see Sri Lanka section).

Note: The Canadian High Commission in Colombo deals with enquiries relating to the Maldives (see Sri Lanka section).

Country dialling code: 960.

2 GENERAL

Area: 298 sq km (115 sq miles).

Population: 269,010 (2000).

Population Density: 902.7 per sq km.

Capital: Malé. Population: 62,973 (1995).

Geography: The Maldives Republic is located 500km (300 miles) southwest of the southern tip of India and consists of about 1190 low-lying coral islands, of which only 200 are inhabited. Most of the inhabited islands are covered by lush tropical vegetation and palm trees, while the numerous uninhabited islands, some of which are mere sand spits or coral tips, are covered in shrubs. Each island is surrounded by a reef enclosing a shallow lagoon. Hundreds of these islands together with other coral growth form an atoll, surrounding a lagoon. All the islands are low-lying, none more than 2m (7ft) above sea level. The majority of the indigenous population do not

mix with the tourist visitors, with the exception of those involved with tourism in the resorts and Malé.

Government: Republic since 1965. Gained independence from the UK in 1965. Head of State and Government: President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom since 1978.

Language: The national language is Dhivehi. English is widely used as a business language in government offices and the commercial sector. Other languages are widely used within tourist areas.

Religion: The indigenous population is almost entirely Sunni Muslim.

Time: GMT + 5.

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Round-pin plugs are used, although square-pin plugs are now becoming more common.

Telephone: IDD is available. Country code: 960. Outgoing international code: 00.

Mobile telephone: GSM 900 network operated by Dhiraagu, the Maldives Telecommunications Company (web site: <http://www.dhiraagu.com.mv>). Handsets can be hired by the day.

Fax: Services are available in Malé and the resorts.

Internet/E-mail: The Internet can be accessed from most areas of the Maldives. Malé, the capital, has a cybercafé and almost all resorts facilitate the sending and receiving of e-mails. The islands' ISP is Dhiraagu.

Telegram: Telecommunications in the Maldives are good - telegram services are available to and from anywhere in the world from Dhiraagu in Malé and the resorts.

Post: Airmail to Western Europe takes about a week. Post office hours: 0730-1330 and 1600-1750 Saturday to Thursday.

Press: The Maldives News Bulletin is published weekly in English. The Dhivehi dailies Haveeru, Aafathis and Miadhu have English sections. Information about local events is widely available on all the resort islands.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:
MHz17.6415.5812.109.410

Voice of America:
MHz17.8215.429.7606.110

3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	Yes	1	Yes

Australian	Yes	1	Yes
Canadian	Yes	1	Yes
USA	Yes	1	Yes
OtherEU	Yes	1	Yes
Japanese	Yes	1	Yes

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for the duration of stay required by all.

VISAS: 1. Tourist visas for 30 days will be issued on arrival only and free of charge to all visitors in possession of valid travel documents. Visas can be extended for 3 months for a fee of Rf450 (US\$40).

Note: Foreign visitors who enter the Maldives must be in possession of return or onward tickets and sufficient funds to cover duration of stay.

4 MONEY

Currency: Maldivian Rufiya (Rf) = 100 laaris. Notes are in denominations of Rf500, 100, 50, 20, 10, 5 and 2. Coins are in denominations of Rf2 and 1, and 50, 25, 10, 5, 2 and 1 laari.

Currency exchange: Major currencies can be exchanged at banks, tourist resort islands, hotels and leading shops. Payments in hotels can be made in most hard currencies (particularly US Dollars) in cash, travellers cheques or credit cards.

Credit cards: Most major island resorts will accept American Express, Visa, MasterCard, Eurocard and Diners Club. Arrangements vary from island to island, and it is advisable to check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other facilities which may be available.

Travellers cheques: These are generally accepted in Sterling and US Dollars. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movement of the Maldivian Rufiya against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date May '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb '01 £1.00=17.47 17.66 17.04 17.19 \$1.00=11.77 11.77 11.77 11.77

Currency restrictions: There are no restrictions on import or export.

Banking hours: 0800-1330 Sunday to Thursday.

5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into the Maldives Republic without incurring customs duty: A reasonable amount of cigarettes, cigars and tobacco; a reasonable number of gifts.

Prohibited items: Pornographic literature, idols of worship, pork products and certain other animal products, explosives, weapons or drugs may not be imported. Alcoholic beverages cannot be imported without an official licence. Drugs are strictly prohibited; the penalty for importing drugs for personal or other use is life imprisonment. Animals require a veterinary certificate, but dogs cannot be imported.

The following may not be exported in any form: turtle shells and products made of turtle shell (the Government has banned the killing of turtles), black coral, eel, pufferfish, parrotfish, skate and ray, big-eyed scad under 15cm (6 ins), bait fish used in tuna fishery, dolphin, whale, lobster, all stony coral, triton shell, trochus shell and pearl oyster.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year Holiday. Mar 8 Eid el-Kebir (Feast of the Sacrifice). Mar 18 Islamic New Year. May 24 National Day. Jun 6 Mouloud (Birth of the Prophet). Jul 26-27 Independence Day. Aug 23 Huravee Day. Oct 19 Martyrs' Day. Nov 3 Victory Day. Nov 11-12 Republic Day. Dec 20-21 Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan). Jan 1 2002 New Year Holiday. Feb 25 Eid el-Kebir (Feast of the Sacrifice). Mar 8 Islamic New Year. May 13 National Day. May 27 Mouloud (Birth of the Prophet). Jul 26-27 Independence Day. Aug 12 Huravee Day. Oct 8 Martyrs' Day. Nov 3 Victory Day. Nov 11-12 Republic Day. Dec 10-11 Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan).

Note: Muslim festivals are timed according to local sightings of various phases of the Moon and the dates given above are approximations. During the lunar month of Ramadan that precedes Eid al-Fitr, Muslims fast during the day and feast at night and normal business patterns may be interrupted. Many restaurants are closed during the day and there may be restrictions on drinking in public places. Some disruption may continue into Eid al-Fitr itself, although this is generally unlikely to affect life on the resort islands. Eid al-Fitr and Eid el-Kebir may last anything from two to ten days, depending on the region. For more information, see the World of Islam appendix.

7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
Yellow Fever	No	1
Cholera	Yes	2
Typhoid and Polio	Yes	-
Malaria	3	-
Food and Drink	4	-

1: A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers arriving from infected areas.

2: Following WHO guidelines issued in 1973, a cholera vaccination certificate is not a condition of entry to the Maldives. However, cholera is a risk in this country and precautions are essential. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness. See the Health appendix.

3: Malaria is present though disappearing.

4: The water provided in the resort areas is generally safe to drink. In other areas water of uncertain origin used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Food in hotels and resorts is usually risk-free, although visitors should be cautious elsewhere.

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix. Hepatitis A, B, and E can occur.

Health care: There are two hospitals on Malé and first-aid facilities are available on all resort islands. Health insurance is recommended.

Travel - International

AIR: The national airline is Air Maldives (L6), operating international services from a number of countries in the region such as India (Tribandrum), Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), Sri Lanka, Thailand (Bangkok) and the United Arab Emirates (Dubai). The airline also plans to start operating flights to and from Europe (London and Paris). Other airlines running services to Malé include Aeroflot, Austrian Airlines, Malaysia Airlines and Singapore Airlines, which operates daily flights into Malé from Singapore.

APPROXIMATE FLIGHT TIME: From Malé to London is 11 hours (excluding stopover).

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT: Hulule International (MLE) (Malé) (web site: <http://maldives.com/tour/arrival.html>) on Hulule Island is 2km (1.2 miles) from Malé (travel time by boat - 15 minutes). Boats from the various island resorts meet each arriving plane to take visitors to their accommodation. There is no scheduled transfer from Hulule Island to the other islands. If an advance booking has been made, representatives of the resorts will receive tourists at the airport and will take care of all onward transport arrangements. Airport facilities include left luggage, first aid, bank, duty-free shops, snack bar, post office and restaurant.

DEPARTURE TAX: US\$10.

Travel - Internal

AIR: Internal air services are operated by Air Maldives, linking Malé with Kaadedhdhoo, Kadhdhoo and Gan. There are also services to Hanimaadhoo in the north, although these islands will not be on most visitors' itineraries.

A number of companies operate twin-otter and float plan services around the Maldives. The transfer from the airport to the resort islands may be an optional extra on the tour. These services are also available for trips around the islands. For further information, contact **Hummingbird Island Airways (tel: 325 708; fax: 323 161)**.

SEA: Visitors generally remain on their resort island for the duration of their stay, although island-hopping trips by ferries are widely available. Local charter boats are also easily available for hire. High-speed boats meet arrivals at the airport, supplied by the resort they are booked with, and boats are available for hire at the ferry counter near the jetty area. The speedboats connect the airport with Ari Atoll and some outlying islands. The indigenous inhabitants, however, live a parochial life and tend to visit only Malé, and even then irregularly.

ROAD: Travel on individual islands does not present any problem since few of them take longer than half an hour to cross on foot.

8 ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS: There are four hotels on Malé and one on Gan; there are also a large number of guest-houses on Malé, although most visitors stay on resort islands. There are no guest houses or self-catering facilities on any of the resort islands. For more information, contact the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI), 3rd Floor, Gadhamoo Buliding, Malé (tel: 326 640; fax: 326 641; e-mail: mati@dhivehinet.net.mv).

RESORTS: There are over 87 resorts which vary from extravagantly luxurious to fairly simple. Accommodation almost invariably consists of thatch-roofed coral cabanas with ensuite facilities. Most of the resorts have air conditioned rooms with mini-bar, although some of the resorts still have fan-cooled rooms. Many resort groups have recently installed desalination plants to provide clean tap water. The resorts are fully integral communities with sport and leisure facilities including scuba diving and snorkelling, restaurants and bars and, in some cases, a shop and/or disco. A few islands have more than one resort and these generally range in size from 6-250 units with most having 30-100 units. There is a shop in every resort island. Different islands tend to attract different nationalities.

Kaafu Atoll - North

For a long time, the Republic of Maldives was one of the best-kept secrets in the world; a beautiful string of low-lying coral islands in the Indian Ocean, a paradise for scuba divers, watersport enthusiasts and sunseekers alike. All of these attractions are still very much in evidence, but in recent years the tourism potential of the country has been developed in the form of a large number of island resorts. Several tour operators have added the Maldives to their programmes, and since the introduction of direct flights from Europe the islands have become an increasingly popular longhaul destination.

The Maldives consist of 26 natural atolls, approximately 1190 islands in all, most of them uninhabited. Most of the resorts are to be found in Malé (Kaafu) Atoll. A few are found in Vaavu, Baa and Lhaviyani. Alifu (Ari) Atoll has been declared the new Tourism Zone of the Maldives and work to upgrade and build new resorts is progressing in this area. All resorts offer night-fishing trips, superb snorkelling and windsurfing, and most have facilities for scuba diving, catamaran sailing, para-sailing, banana-boating, waterskiing and volleyball. Some offer other sporting facilities, including badminton and tennis.

The following section describes some of the major resort islands in the Maldives. Further information can be obtained from tour operators or by contacting the island resort directly. The capital of the Maldives is Malé, situated close to the airport on the southern point of the North Malé Atoll. Although accommodation is available, very few foreign visitors stay in the capital; even those doing business normally stay in one of the nearby resort islands and travel to Malé by boat. The capital has several shops which sell examples of local handicrafts and imported goods. Other attractions include the National Museum, the fish and fruit markets, the beautiful 17th-century Hukuru (or Friday) Mosque and the Grand Mosque, with its magnificent gold-domed minaret; in fact there are over 20 mosques scattered around Malé.

The following section describes some of the major resorts in the Kaafu Atoll (also known as the North and South Malé Atolls). See the map for location.

Baros covers a land area of 60,680sqm and the beach length of 1024m, and this oval-shaped island is located approximately one hour by boat from the airport. One side of the island is full of corals, within 3-6m (10-20ft) of the shallow beach, perfect for snorkelling and diving lessons, whilst the other side is a superb beach ideal for swimming and waterskiing.

East of Baros is the island of Bandos, one of the larger resorts whose accommodation consists of well-furnished beach bungalows with a view of the beach. There is a particularly good diving school; one of the attractions is a dive down to the aptly-named Shark Point.

The diving paradise Vaadhu, on the north tip of the South Malé Atoll and about 45 minutes by taxi boat and 20 minutes by speed boat from the airport, also has a fully-equipped diving school. There are 31 cabana-style rooms on this island whose features include freshwater showers, and which reflect the high level of capital investment which has been made in the resort.

Hudhuveli: Hudhuveli, situated on the east side of the North Malé Atoll is, like Bandos and Vaadhu, operated by Deen's Orchid Agency. It is a modern beach resort with single-unit bungalows with straw roofing and freshwater showers.

Ihuru: Ihuru is a small island, exceedingly beautiful and much photographed. The accommodation consists of simple bungalows with a total of 90 beds.

Kurumba: Kurumba, a tiny island covering an area of half a square mile, is 15 minutes by boat from the airport and 10 minutes from Malé. There are conference facilities, swimming pools, gymnasias and jacuzzis, as well as five restaurants. Most watersports can be arranged, including scuba diving; the colourful fish in the lagoon will eat out of your hand.

Nakatchafushi: Nakatchafushi boasts the country's largest lagoon, and is perhaps one of the most photographed of all the islands. Located on the western side of the Malé Atoll, it is 24km (15 miles) from the airport, a travel time of approximately 90 minutes. The lagoon is perfect for watersports and a long strip of sand at the western end of the island is a haven for beachcombers. There is also a swimming pool.

Full Moon (Furana): Full Moon (Furana) is a resort which can be reached in 20 minutes from the airport. The resort's deep lagoon makes it a favourite base for visiting yachts. It also boasts a gymnasium, a business centre and five restaurants.

Giraavaru: Giraavaru lies 11km (7 miles) from the airport. It can be reached by speed boat (15 minutes) or by normal transfer boat (45 minutes). The well-appointed rooms face either a tropical garden or have a view of the Indian Ocean. The beauty of Reethi Rah seems to be completely untouched. Thatched bungalows and 10 water bungalows built on stilts over the lagoon are influenced by local architectural styles without missing any of the modern comforts.

Summer Island Village: Summer Island Village offers 93 air-conditioned rooms in an idyllic tropical setting.

Makunudhoo: Makunudhoo is reached by a 2-hour voyage from the airport. It is one of the most expensive resorts and one that is renowned for its food. The Maldivian-run island probably provides the best anchorage of any resort and always has yachts for charter. It is protected on all sides by a beautiful lagoon. The accommodation consists of individual thatched bungalows situated in coconut groves leading down to the beach.

Kanifinolhu (Kani): Kanifinolhu (Kani) is on the eastern edge of the atoll. The seas around the island boast some of the best inside reefs in the country, and the protection provided by the external reef makes diving possible even in the roughest conditions. The style of the accommodation is influenced by local and oriental design and some rooms have air-conditioning. The island has a desalination plant for fresh water.

Farukolhufushi (Club Med): Farukolhufushi (Club Med) and Thulhaagiri have superb facilities for watersports. Both have a swimming pool and Thulhaagiri has one windsurfing board for every twin-bedded room. Club Med has a qualified team organising sport and leisure activities during the day and in the evening.

Other highly regarded north Malé resorts are Boduhithi and the neighbouring Kudahithi and, closer to the airport, Lhohifushi, which has a beautiful lagoon and a wide range of watersport facilities. Kudahithi, one of the most expensive resorts in the Maldives, has only six units - excellent for small, private groups.

Kaafu Atoll - South

Still in the Malé (Kaafu) Atoll, but to the south of the airport, are a further score of resorts. Notable among these are Biyadhoo and Villivaru which are 33km (21 miles) from the airport. Both are owned and managed by the Taj group from India. The nearby Cocoa Island has only eight 2-storey thatched huts, all of which are beautifully furnished. Private groups can rent the entire resort.

To the south of Cocoa Island are the 'twin' islands of Veligandu Huraa (Palm Tree Island) and Dhigufinolhu, connected by a causeway across the lagoon. The latter is the more lively of the **two, with more rooms and more in the way of entertainment:** Veligandu Huraa has individual bungalows and a more intimate atmosphere. They are only a gentle stroll away from each other should one feel the need for a change of mood.

North of Cocoa Island is Kadooma, where flowering shrubs surround chalet-style accommodation. Trips can be arranged to the nearby fishing village.

Bodufinolhu: Bodufinolhu (Fun Island) is located on the eastern reef of the South Malé Atoll. It is ringed with a massive lagoon and connected to two uninhabited islets which can be reached on foot at low tide. All rooms are on the beachfront with en suite bathrooms, air-conditioning, IDD telephones and hot and cold desalinated water.

Embudu Village: Embudu Village is located 11km (7 miles) from the airport in South Malé Atoll. The resort offers 36 non air-conditioned bungalows, 72 air-conditioned bungalows and 16 deluxe bungalows built over the lagoon. It boasts a house reef as well as two wrecks, caves and drop offs.

Other Atolls

Most of the other resorts are to be found in the North and South Malé Atolls, but there are also several others, most in the northern island groups (see map).

Resorts in the Alifu (Ari) Atoll, which is to the west of Malé with 26 resorts, include Kuramathi, a relatively large island which has first-class facilities and offers an excellent beach, superb diving, windsurfing, water-skiing, parasailing and night fishing and has three resorts. Aribeach is a 121-room resort offering standard and superior accommodation with hot and cold fresh water, air-conditioning and a superb range of scuba diving and watersport facilities. Nika Island is a small, away-from-it-all, upmarket, 25-room resort offering clients some of the most comfortable boats in the Maldives. Fesdu is situated in the heart of the atoll rather than on the periphery.

Accommodation consists of 50 thatched round-houses, all of which are close to the beach.

Angaga, also in Ari Atoll, is small and impressively constructed in traditional Maldivian style and with air-conditioned rooms and fresh hot and cold water. Among other resorts are Halaveli, Bathala, Ellaidoo, Machchafushi, Gangehi, Madoogali and Maayaafushi. Several others are under construction or have recently opened and there are now 23 resorts in the Ari Atoll.

To the south is the Vaavu Atoll with some of the best diving in the entire archipelago. A well-established, long-popular resort, especially among visiting Italians, is the 70-bungalow Alimatha.

To the north is Lhaviani Atoll with the fairly simple 250-bungalow Kuredhdhoo resort, essentially a spot for the besotted diver.

The Baa Atoll is about 130km (80 miles) northwest of the capital, one of the few places where traditional arts and crafts are still practised, and now home to five resorts. The atoll's coral reefs are in pristine condition and are famous for the large number of mantas and reef sharks visiting during the southwest monsoon (May to July). The resorts of Reethi Beach and Coco Palm are both 5-star, each with over 100 rooms divided into three categories of luxurious villas. There are five restaurants, a fully equipped gym and even squash and tennis courts. Unlike other islands, Baa has its own in-house doctor. Transfer is a 30-minute journey by sea plane or helicopter from the airport. The Soneva Fushi resort, situated on Kunfunadhoo Island, has 62 villas, all scattered along the beach front on both sides of the island. It is situated 75 miles north of Malé airport (25-30 minutes by Hummingbird Island Airways). Soneva Fushi has two main restaurants, both offering interior and exterior dining with local and international cuisine. The atoll's three other resorts are Coco Palm Resort (100 rooms), Royal Island (150 rooms) and Le Meridien (Kihaadhuffaru) (100 rooms), all of which have facilities for a wide range of water sports, a health spa and a professional dive school.

Most tourism is in the northern atolls, but Seenu, the southernmost atoll of the archipelago (situated south of the equator), is known to many as the site of a former RAF staging post in Gan. It provides tourist accommodation at the Ocean Reef Club. There is a regular, heavily-booked domestic flight between Malé and Gan operated by Air Maldives.

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

The Maldives' 1190 low-lying coral islands represent a paradise for lovers of waterports, particularly snorkelling and diving enthusiasts. For further information on different atolls and resorts, see the Resorts & Excursions section.

Watersports: Watersports: Exceptional and easily accessible underwater life make the Maldives one of the world's top diving and snorkelling destinations. All of the resorts have professional dive schools, with fully qualified multilingual instructors offering a range of courses, from beginners to full PADI certification. Basic diving equipment is provided in all resorts and some also rent out underwater cameras. Dive schools organise daily dive boat trips to sites around the islands throughout the year. Night dives and special trips for more experienced divers are also available. Most of the resorts also offer reef sightseeing trips on glass-bottomed boats. Below is a selection of the best dive sites in the Maldives:

Maldives Victory Wreck: The wreck of the Maldives Victory (which sank in 1981) lies on the western side of Hulule island at a depth of 35m (115 ft). Due to strong currents, this dive is for experienced divers only.

Mushimasingili Thila (Shark Thila): Located in the northern section of the Ari Atoll, close to the islands of Fesdu, Halaveli, Maayafushi and Ellaidhu. Renowned for its abundance in fish, notably grey reef shark, giant snappers and tropical reef fish.

Guraidhoo Corner: Near the islands of Losfushi, Guraidhoo and Kandooma, this reef lies on the east side of the South Malé Atoll. Powerful vertical currents make this suitable for experienced divers only. The reef is particularly known for its large fish, including grey reef sharks, eagle rays, sailfish and large snappers.

Kuda Rah Thila (Broken Rock): Located in the southernmost corner of the Ari Atoll, close to the islands of Dhangethi and Dhigurah. Good for less experienced divers as the currents are fairly weak.

Banana Reef: Located on the eastern side of the North Malé Atoll, near the islands of Fullmoon Island, Farukolh, Fushi and Kurumba. Strong currents make for an exceptionally abundant marine life, with reef sharks, bannerfish and oriental sweetlips all present.

Note: Note: Visitors should note that the Maldives adhere to a strict reef and marine conservation policy and that severe penalties may be imposed for disrespecting the environment (see also 'Prohibited Items' in the Duty Free section).

The large lagoons surrounding most of the islands are ideal for windsurfing, a sport extensively catered for in all resorts (with windsurfing schools available in most of them). Surfing has recently become popular and there are a number of resorts on the atoll edges that have good waves, notably those located in the north of the South Malé atolls. Many resorts offer regular boat trips to surf breaks. The best time for surfing is during the northeast monsoon (November to April). A list of the best surfing spots is available from the Maldives Tourism Promotion Board (see address section). Most resorts also have waterskiing facilities and catamarans for hire. Most of the larger resorts also offer facilities and courses for parasailing.

Fishing: Fishing has been the lifeline of the Maldives' people and, with over 99% of the Maldives' total area consisting of water, the country has some of the world's best fishing grounds. Many resorts offer fishing trips on modern speedboats equipped for big game fishing. Night fishing for groupers, snappers, squirrelfish or barracuda is particularly popular. Fishing trips will usually end with a barbecue at the resort with the day's catch being cooked and eaten.

Note: Note: As a conservation measure, sport fishing is confined to the tag and release method. The use of harpoon guns and hunting of marine mammals such as whales and dolphins and large fish such as the whale shark is strictly prohibited. The fishing and collection of the following is also prohibited: turtle, Napoleon wrasse, berried and small lobster, conch, giant clam and black coral.

Some resorts have facilities for sports such as tennis, football, volleyball and badminton.

Sailing: Sailing: In order to allow visitors to see more than one of the Maldives' many islands, several types of sailing cruises are available (including diving safaris or relaxing cruises through the atolls). Some boats offer luxury accommodation and all modern amenities, while others offer more basic facilities. Further details can be obtained from the Maldives Tourism Promotion Board (see address section).

Excursions: Excursions: Different types of excursions are available. Island-hopping tours usually last for a full or half day and frequently combine a visit to a fishing village with a trip to an uninhabited island (where often a beach barbecue will be served). Traditional boats (dhoni) or speedboats can be hired privately. There are options for spending a day and night alone on an uninhabited island. Aerial excursions usually combine aerial sightseeing with diving. Photo flights are also possible. Further details can be obtained from the Maldives Tourism Promotion Board (see address section).

10 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Malé, the capital, has a few simple restaurants which serve local and international food. On the other islands there are a few restaurants in addition to those run by the resorts. Cuisine is international, with all foodstuffs other than seafood imported. The fish is magnificent. Curries and oriental buffets are widely available. Drink: There is a good range of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drink available at the resorts, reflecting the demands of the visitors. There are a few local cocktails, including The Maldivian Lady, a powerful and delicious concoction, whose composition varies from bar to bar and island to island.

Note: All bars are situated in tourist resorts (no alcohol is available on Malé). All accept cash, but normally add orders onto the total bill. Locals do not drink at all. During the month of Ramadan (see Public Holidays) visitors are not allowed to drink alcohol in public except in the tourist resorts.

Nightlife: There is little or no organised nightlife, though most resorts have informal discotheques around the bar areas, sometimes featuring live bands playing either traditional or Western music. Beach parties and barbecues are also popular. On some evenings many resorts have cultural shows and some show videos.

Shopping: Local purchases include sea shells (only when bought in official shops; they may not be removed from the beach or from the sea), lacquered wooden boxes and reed mats. There are strict prohibitions against the export of coral. Shopping hours: 0830-2300 Saturday to Thursday; 1330-2300 Friday. Shops officially shut for 15 minutes five times a day in deference to Muslim prayer times; however, this rule is not always strictly adhered to in the tourist areas away from the capital.

Special Events: Jan 1 2001 New Year Celebrations. Jan Floating exhibition. May 24 National Day. Jul 26-27 Independence Day Theme Floats. Sep 27 Tourism Day. Oct Culinary Exhibition.

Social Conventions: Dress is informal, but locals, who are Muslim, will be offended by nudity or scanty clothing in public places, and the Government rigidly enforces these standards. Bikinis and other scanty beach wear are not acceptable in Malé or on any other inhabited island. When entering a mosque, the legs and the body, but not the neck and the face, should be covered. Handshaking is the most common form of greeting. The indigenous population not involved in the tourist trade lives in isolated island communities maintaining almost total privacy. A large number of locals smoke, but smoking and eating during Ramadan is discouraged. Tipping: This is officially discouraged.

11 BUSINESS PROFILE

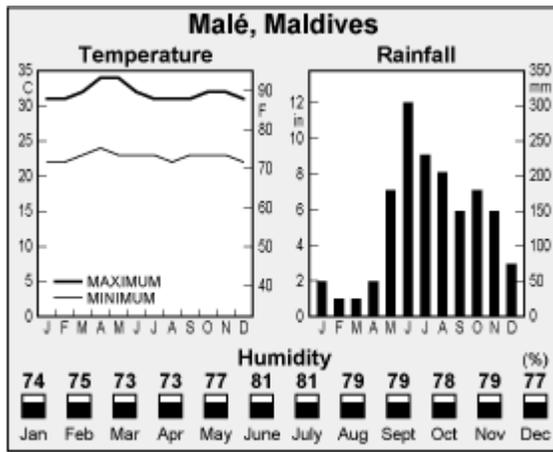
Economy: Small quantities of cereals, fruit and vegetables are grown on the little fertile land available on the islands. The fishing industry is far more important: tuna fishing accounts for half of the Maldives' export earnings. The industrial sector has grown substantially since 1980 as a result of major infrastructure investment in desalination plants, refurbished accommodation, generators and air conditioning. Much of this was originally designed for use by the tourist industry, which has also grown rapidly following the decline of shipping, and now accounts for almost one-quarter of GDP. Otherwise, there is some light industrial activity, including fish-canning, textiles and boat building. However, development of this part of the economy is constrained by the islands' relative isolation and the small size of the domestic market. Hopes that the Maldives might become an oil producer were dashed when a ten-year exploration programme failed to locate deposits in the islands' territorial waters. The Maldives is a member of the Asian Development Bank and the Colombo Plan.

Business: Since the islands import almost everything, business potential is high, but only on Malé. Most business takes place during the morning. An informal attitude prevails. Appointments should be made well in advance. For business meetings men normally wear a shirt and tie and a lightweight or tropical suit. Women wear a lightweight suit or equivalent. Handshaking is the customary form of greeting. Office hours: 0730-1430 Sunday to Thursday. Friday and Saturday are official rest days.

Commercial Information: The following organisation can offer advice: State Trading Organisation, STO Building, 7 Haveeree Higon, Malé 20-02 (tel: 323 279; fax: 325 218; e-mail: sto@dhivehinet.net.mv).

Conferences/Conventions: For further information, contact Kurumba Village, Universal Enterprises Ltd, 38 Orchid Magu, Malé. Tel: 442 324. Fax: 322 678 or 320 274; or Bandos Island Resort, North Malé Atoll (tel: 440 088; fax: 443 877; e-mail: bandos@netlink.net.mv); or Paradise Island, Villa Hotels, STO Trade Centre, Malé (tel: 440 011; fax: 440 022).

12 CLIMATE



The Maldives have a hot tropical climate. There are two monsoons, the southwest from May to October and the northeast from November to April. Generally the southwest brings more wind and rain in June and July. The temperature rarely falls below 25°C (77°F). The best time to visit is November to Easter.

Required clothing: Lightweight cottons and linens throughout the year. Light waterproofs are advised during the rainy season.

13 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: The Dhivehin, as the islanders are called, are a mixed people of Aryan, Negroid, Sinhalese, Dravidian and Arab descent. The Maldivian Islands became a British Protectorate, with an elected Sultan as head of state, in 1887. The islands became a republic, briefly, in 1953-54 and achieved full independence as a sultanate in 1965. Three years later, the Republic of the Maldivian Islands was re-established and Ibrahim Nasir, Prime Minister since 1954, became President. In 1978, President Nasir decided against a third term as President, and was succeeded by Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Gayoom established a 'Citizens' Special Majlis' which began work in 1980 with a brief to revise the constitution. In 1985, the Maldives was a founder member of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and hosted regional summits in 1990 and 1997. An attempted coup, successfully put down with the aid of Indian troops, occurred in late 1988. During 1990, efforts were made to improve political and economic relations with India under the guidance of the India-Maldives Joint Commission on Economic and Technical Co-operation. Global climatic changes have also been a cause of concern to the low-lying islands,

and the Maldives hosted an international conference on the subject in 1989. In 1990 increasing criticism of the country's oligarchic political regime was met by President Gayoom's decision to devolve certain presidential powers and introduce a package of reforms. Three years later, Gayoom was re-elected for a further 5-year term after which an extensive cabinet reshuffle and governmental re-organisation followed. Among the most important measures was the creation in 1996 of a Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, working under direct presidential control, whose task was to provide advice on matters relating to Islam. The following year the Citizens' Special Majlis (see above), after 17 years of work, produced its final report which recommended a number of important revisions to the constitution. These included: increasing the size of the Majlis, expanding the powers of ministers and the rights of citizens and creating the posts of Auditor-General and Commissioner for Elections. The new constitution was ratified by President Gayoom and came into effect in January 1998.

Government: : Under the revised constitution which came into effect in 1998, the legislature, or Majlis, has 50 members. 42 are directly elected for a 5-year term (two from Malé and two from each of the 20 atolls); the remaining eight are presidential appointees. The president holds executive power assisted by an appointed ministerial cabinet. Outside the capital, however, considerable power is exercised by the atoll chiefs (Atholhu Verins), who are appointed by the president.

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