



Introduction

The Maldivian islands welcome you to a vacation of a lifetime that will leave you spellbound forever. These ever-welcoming shores will captivate your inner soul with its enchanting beauty. The saltwater people are naturally blessed with the pristine formation of the islands they call home. Not only do you get to enjoy the serenity of the surrounding, the warm and friendly faces of its people make your stay in the Maldives all the more special.

The Maldives is a nation of coral islands dispersed stunningly across the blue depths of the Indian Ocean. This complex archipelago of a nation is covered 99% in the sea with its islands forming around a ring shaped coral reef surrounded by a lagoon. Of these islands, around 200 are inhabited and about 85 are tourist resorts. The capital city island, Malé, is located within Malé atoll, which is in the center of the strip of islands that makes up the Maldives.

Maldivians have always been voyagers. Legends tell of far away kingdoms that were presented with Maldivian riches sent from a king of a thousand islands. These 1,190 coral islands are one of the most beautiful sights of this world. Undeniably the reason why the Maldives has become one of the most sought after tourist destinations of this earth.

The white sand on the beaches and the ever-useful coconut trees that fill each island... The rich coral reefs that surround and the unique formation of atolls... The mysterious origins of its people, the peoples' subsistent mode of living, and their intricate fine arts and crafts... All this and more has left many a visitor wondering in amusement for centuries. One such art still prevalent is the Maldivian sail dhoni, which still continues to amaze anyone taking a good look at it, or anyone taking good look at the surroundings while travelling in it, like we do.

See the 1,190 islands through the eyes of Voyages Maldives.

Location & Geography

Maldives is a series of 1,190 coral islands grouped into 26 atolls located in the Indian Ocean. For convenience, these atolls are divided into 19 administrative groups and named according to the letters of the Maldivian alphabets. Maldives has an area of less than 300 square kilometers and a total coastline of 644 kilometers. It's located about 700 kilometers southwest of Sri Lanka and 400 kilometers southwest of India. Maldives is the smallest Asian country in both population and land area. With an average ground level of 1.5 meters (4 ft. 11 in) above sea level, it is the planet's lowest country.

The unwritten history of the formation of Maldives has remained a mystery. One of the most popular theories of the countries formation was that of Charles Darwin. According to him coral reefs grew on the edge of prehistoric volcanoes. These volcanoes have gradually submerged into the ocean a long time ago, leaving behind a perfect environment for marine life and ecosystem to thrive.

History

The historians date early settlers back to 5th century BC with the Aryan immigrants coming from the neighboring countries India and Sri Lanka. It is believed that Hinduism existed before Buddhism. The Maldivians were practicing Buddhism until AD 1153, when a learned scholar converted the king to Islam. Since the conversion to Islam, the Maldives boasts of a recorded history that is rich and colorful. The system of government was a monarchy with Sultans as sovereigns while Sultanas or queens ruled on rare occasions. In 1558 the Portuguese seized control of the country, after defeating Ali 6th, the reigning Sultan. In 1573 Muhammad Thakurufaanu, from the island of Utheemu, and his compatriots defeated the Portuguese invaders. Muhammad Thakurufaanu was offered the throne and remains a revered national hero.

In 1887 Maldives went into a protectorate agreement with Great Britain. The British pledged to protect the Maldives from any foreign aggression while the Maldives in turn agreed not to collaborate with any other foreign power without British consent. In 1953 the Maldives changed from a monarchy to a Republic. Mr. Mohammed Amin Didi was the first President of the Maldives. The British finally agreed to give independence to the Maldives in 1965.

Weather & Climate

The Maldives has a tropical climate and as such there is relatively little change in the overall temperature throughout the year. The islands are subject to a double monsoon. The southwest monsoon occurs from May to November and the northeast monsoon prevails from December to April. The northeast monsoon does not attract the same degree of cloud cover or rainfall as the southwest monsoon, and the occasional afternoon shower will not detract from your enjoyment of the islands. Severe monsoon storms are very rare. Throughout the year daytime temperatures are around the mid 20's degrees Celsius. Night temperatures are pleasantly warm, although sea breezes can be quite cool. The hottest month is April and the coldest is December.

Language

The language of the Maldives is Dhivehi and displays much resemblance to several other languages from Sri Lanka, South East Asia, and North India. Dhivehi contains many Arabic, Hindi and English words. English is widely spoken by Maldivians. In the resorts, a variety of other languages like German, French, Italian etc. are spoken by the staff.

Culture

Maldivian culture is strongly influenced by the shipwrecked sailors and merchants from different parts of the world who have visited the shores in the past. Traders from Arab, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Persia visited the Maldives to exchange goods. Slaves were also brought from Africa. These visitors contributed much to the language, culture and lifestyle of the Maldivians.

Bodu Beru is the most popular form of music & dance in the country, believed to have been introduced in the early 19th century by African slaves. Historians believe that Thaara, which is also popular among local entertainment, have been introduced from the Middle East. Other forms of dance such as Bandiya Jehun have a strong South Asian flavor.

Currency

The currency in the Maldives is the Rufiyaa, consisting of 100 Laari. The US dollar is the most commonly used foreign currency. We recommend that you bring US dollars (in cash) as it is readily accepted. All international currencies can be exchanged to local currency on arrival at the airport, at resorts or banks in Male'. The current exchange rate for USD is 15.42 Rufiyaa. Credit cards are accepted at many of the beach resorts. However it is best to have some cash on hand.

Visa & Entry

All nationalities will be issued a free 30 days visa upon arrival in the Maldives. A valid passport, a return ticket and proof of sufficient funds are all necessary to enter the country. Visa extensions are granted by Department of Immigration and Emigration in Male' for visitors who provide proof of sufficient funds and who stay in a resort or hotel, or present a letter from a sponsor. Heavy fines and deportation applies to those who overstay without proper authorization.

Crossing the Border

- Import of pornography, idols of worship, pork products, explosives, weapons or drugs is strictly prohibited.
- Penalty for importing drugs for personal use or trafficking is life imprisonment.
- Alcohol and pork products imported by a special license are available in all resorts and safari boats.
- Prohibited exports include, black corals, pearl oysters, trochus shells, triton shells, turtles, puffer fish, parrot fish, eels, skates & rays, lobsters, dolphins, whales, big eye scad under 6" and all types of corals (except organ pipe coral).
- Marine species prohibited from killing, catching and collection or extraction from Maldivian waters are dolphins, whales, berried female lobsters, giant clams, triton shells, black coral, napoleon wrasse, whale shark, turtles.

Travel Tips

- The Maldives is an Islamic country. However, bikinis and other beachwear is acceptable at beach resorts but not whilst exploring the inhabited islands.
- When visiting the capital Male', or local islands, visitors should adopt a more modest form of dress and ensure that shoulders and thighs, at least, are covered.
- Topless sunbathing is against the law.
- Handshaking is the usual form of greeting and while a large number of the locals smoke this is discouraged during Ramadan together with eating.
- Traditionally the locals eat with their right fingers. If you wish to follow local customs please be aware that it is considered unhygienic to touch food with your left hand.
- Possession of illegal drugs carries severe penalties and the public demonstration or observance of religions other than Islam is banned.

Useful Dhivehi

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| Hello | As-salaam Alaikum |
| How are you? | Haalu Kihineh? |
| I am going | Aharen dhanee |
| Where | Kobaa? |
| Why | Keeve? |
| Who | Kaaku? |
| Thank you | Shukuriyyaa |
| Whose? | Kaakuge? |
| What? | Keekey? |
| Wait | Madu kurey |
| Come | Aadhey |
| Good | Ran'galhu |
| Welcome | Maruhaba |
| I am sorry | Ma-aafukurey |
| Yes | Aan |
| No | Noon |
| Don't know | Neynge |
| Who is that? | E ee kaaku? |
| What time is it? | Gandhin kihaaireh? |
| How much is this? | Kihaa Varakah? |
| What is your name | Konnamehkiyanee? |
| My name is | Aharengenamakee... |
| Where are you from | Konrasheh? |
| Good bye | Dhanee |