



Maldives

The Maldives archipelago possesses matchless tropical beauty, and is the perfect stage for the holiday of a lifetime. Stunning white-sand beaches, iridescent sunsets and dazzling reefs await those who escape to these blissful shores, which lie across around 1,192 coral islands in the Indian Ocean.

Most of the inhabited islands are staunchly Islamic in character, yet the resort islands are allowed to exist in a kind of bubble where more typically western behaviour is tolerated. The overwhelming majority of visitors to the Maldives book all-inclusive holiday packages and play on their resort island of choice, soaking up the sun on the pristine beaches, learning to surf, or exploring the impressive coral reefs with a dive instructor.

The best resorts are Kuramathi (for family-friendliness), Banyan Tree (for elegance), and Baros (for luxury), though there are plenty to choose from and none are likely to disappoint. Travellers should also visit the colourful bazaars in the bustling capital, Male.

Best time to visit the Maldives

The archipelago has a humid tropical climate and its year-round high temperatures are tempered by cooling sea breezes. The best time to visit the Maldives is during the dry season (December to April), though this is also the high tourist season, meaning prices will be higher and accommodation might be scarce. The best months for diving are November and April; the best time for surfing is from March to May and then again from September to November.

What to see in the Maldives

-Get lost in the busy capital city of Male with its beautiful mosques, bustling bazaars and interesting museums.

-Visit the Huskuru Miskiiy (Friday Mosque): a magnificent 17th-century structure that is famous for its golden dome and coral engravings.

What do in the Maldives

- Plan a wedding or honeymoon at one of the exclusive resort islands.
- Learn to surf, do a diving course, or try any number of watersports.
- Head to Fuamulaku and go on a jungle hike to explore the island's great biodiversity.

Getting to the Maldives

Cheap flights to the Maldives are easy to find from the US and UK. Direct flights to Male International Airport are available from some major British airports, with the flight taking about 10 hours. Those flying from the United States will have to book a connecting flight. Some resort islands are accessible by air; others will require travel by boat from Male.

Read

The Strode Venturer by Hammond Innes and *Beach Babylon* by Imogen Edward-Jones.

Watch

The Island President (2011)

Eat

Mas huni (shredded smoked fish served with grated coconut and onion), *fihunu mas* (barbecued fish basted with chilli and spices) and *bambukeylu hiti* (breadfruit, served in a variety of ways).

What to buy

The Maldives is not known as a shopping destination, and the range of souvenirs available is mainly limited to fridge magnets, t-shirts, postcards and shell necklaces.

What to pack

Lightweight clothing, insect repellent and sunscreen are necessary for a holiday in the Maldives. Visitors should not pack alcohol or pork products or pornography, as these items will land them in trouble with authorities on their way into the country.

What's on in the Maldives

Republic Day (11 November) is the most festive of the Maldives' national holidays. It celebrates the (second) abolishment of the monarchy that occurred in 1968.

Did you know?

- At an average of just 4'11" above sea level, the island-chain of the Maldives is the world's lowest country.
- Only 200 of the 1,192 islets that make up the Maldives are inhabited.
- Cowry shells were used as currency in the olden days and are still displayed on modern currency bills.

A final word

The great attraction of a holiday in the Maldives is that visitors know precisely what they're going to get: fancy all-inclusive resorts, clean white-sand beaches, gorgeous turquoise waters, and limitless diving opportunities.

Things to do in Maldives

Maldives travel info

Electricity

The electrical current in Maldives is 230 volts, 50Hz. A variety of plugs are in use, including the two-pin flat blade plug and the round three-pin plug.

Language

Dhivehi is the national language in Maldives. English is widely spoken in addition to German, French, Italian, and Japanese, which are spoken by the resort staff.

Money

The Maldivian rufiyaa (MVR) is divided into 100 laari. The resorts in the Maldives are generally expensive and travellers should ensure they bring sufficient funds. ATMs are available; major credit cards are accepted at most resorts and hotels. US dollars can be exchanged at the airport, banks, or hotels. Banks are usually closed on Fridays and Saturdays.

Tipping

Tipping is not expected in the Maldives, but waiters and room staff will appreciate a tip if the service is good, even if a service charge has already been added.

Health

Visitors to the Maldives should take precautions against mosquito bites as cases of dengue fever and Chikungunya virus have been reported. Those who will be spending a lot of time outdoors and are at risk of animal bites may be advised to get a rabies vaccination.

There are very few fully equipped hospitals on Male and in Hulhumale and, though most resort islands are within reach of a doctor, many are several hours' travel away from the comprehensive facilities on Male. Travel insurance is advised.

If visitors require a certain medication on holiday, it is best to bring it in its original packaging, with a dated and signed letter from a doctor detailing what the medication is and why it is needed.

Safety

Crime levels are low in the Maldives but petty theft does occur. It is best not to leave goods unattended on the beaches or in hotel rooms. There is a measure of political instability and visitors are advised to avoid public gatherings and demonstrations, particularly on Male Island, as these can turn violent. However, resorts in the Maldives are considered very safe and there are rarely any disturbances. The sea around the Maldives can have strong tidal currents and there is a risk of drowning; swimmers should exercise caution.

Local customs

Maldivians are predominantly Muslim, and therefore Islamic customs should be respected, particularly during the month of Ramadan when eating, drinking, and smoking during daylight hours should be discreet as it is forbidden by the Muslim culture.

No pornography is allowed (or any material considered offensive under Islamic law) and homosexuality is illegal. Same-sex relationships are not tolerated and carry jail sentences and fines. Alcohol consumption is confined to the resorts.

Dress is informal but nudism and topless bathing is prohibited. On visits to inhabited islands it is important to respect local customs that adhere to conservative dress codes, and public observance of any religion other than Islam is prohibited. The Maldives has strong anti-drug laws that carry severe penalties.

Doing business

Though business tends to be conducted in a laidback way, visitors should remember that this is a Muslim country and that they should be polite, adhere to local customs and dress conservatively (albeit in lightweight attire). Business cards are usually expected at a meeting; visitors should not expect to find any alcohol unless they're doing business at one of the many resorts that dot the islands. Meetings are usually scheduled for mornings and are typically conducted in English. Business hours are usually 7.30am to 2.30pm, Sunday to Thursday.

Duty free

Travellers to the Maldives who are older than 16 years of age do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes, 25 cigars or 250 grams of tobacco; other personal items up to the value of 6000 MVR. Prohibited items include alcohol, firearms, pork, narcotics and psychotropic substances, pornography, religious materials that may be offensive to Islam, and religious idols for worship.

Communications

The international access code for the Maldives is +960. Travellers can purchase local SIM cards for unlocked phones; all resorts, hotels and guesthouses offer free WiFi.

Useful contacts

Maldives Tourist Office: +960 323 228 or www.visitmaldives.com

Emergencies: 119 (Police); 102 (Ambulance).

Climate in Maldives

The temperature in the Maldives is hot throughout the year and, although the humidity is relatively high, the constant sea breezes help to keep the air moving and give some relief from the heat. The weather in the Maldives is fairly constant throughout the year, with average daily temperatures ranging from 87°F (31°C) to 78°F (26°C).

Although there aren't four distinct seasons, there is a wet season in the Maldives, which runs from April to October, when strong winds can also be expected and the weather gradually gets colder (although not by much).

The best time to visit the Maldives is between mid-December and April, during the dry season, when the weather is hot and pleasant and there is little wind. However, this is also the tourist high season, and resorts are not only more expensive and crowded but often fully booked and difficult to get into. Prices are a little less expensive in March and April, particularly outside the Easter school holidays, but the climate is still ideal for a relaxing beach holiday.

Some travellers prefer to brave the wet season to enjoy a more peaceful and private holiday at more reasonable prices. The best time for a diving or snorkeling is between December and May, when the winds blow from the northeast, the sky is clear and the seas are calm.
