

ASIA · BEACHES · ISLANDS · DIVING · WILDLIFE



Maldives

Some 1,190 coral islands strung across 26 atolls make the Maldives the world's lowest-lying country and one of its best for snorkelling and diving. Whale sharks cruise South Ari all year, and mantas gather at Hanifaruru Bay in the monsoon. Private-island resorts set the price ceiling; guesthouses on local islands bring it right down.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Maldives and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 12 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Malé	 CURRENCY Maldivian rufiyaa (MVR) £1 ≈ MVR 20.63	 LANGUAGE Dhivehi, English	 BEST TIME Jan–Apr
 DAILY BUDGET £70–£600 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, D, G 230V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 10h 30m direct ~£650–£1,300 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+5 standard time

The Maldives is less a destination than a choice of island. Fewer than 200 islands are home to Maldivian communities, and more than 150 others are given over entirely to resorts, each a self-contained world of villas, house reefs and restaurants. The nearest lie in North and South Malé atolls, a speedboat ride from the airport; Ari and Baa, known for whale sharks and mantas, are a seaplane or domestic-flight hop away; and the far south, around Fuvahmulah and Addu, draws serious divers. Most visitors stay on one island, perhaps two, for a week or more.

The pace is barefoot and tide-driven: snorkel the house reef, dive, eat, sleep. Costs range more widely than almost anywhere — an all-inclusive villa can top £1,000 a night, while a guesthouse room on Maafushi or Thoddoo costs a fraction of that, with boat trips to sandbanks and reefs. Resorts suit honeymooners and divers; local islands suit budget travellers comfortable with Islamic customs, no alcohol and designated bikini beaches. Many are surprised by how much of the appeal lies underwater, how compact Malé is and how quickly the weather turns in the south-west monsoon.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Hanifaruru Bay

A small reef inlet in Baa Atoll's UNESCO biosphere reserve where, roughly between June and November, plankton blooms can draw scores of manta rays and the odd whale shark at once; snorkelling only, with rangers limiting numbers.
- 2

WILDLIFE

South Ari Atoll whale sharks

The Maldives' best place to swim with whale sharks year-round, mostly juveniles patrolling the outer reef near Maamigili and Dhigurah; boats leave from resorts and guesthouses and follow a strict code of conduct.

3

ADVENTURE

Fuvahmulah

A single-island atoll in the Equatorial Channel, renowned for diving with tiger sharks year-round, plus thresher shark sightings; on land, freshwater lakes and taro fields make it unlike any other Maldivian island.

4

HISTORY

Old Friday Mosque, Malé

Built in 1658 from intricately carved coral stone, Hukuru Miskiy is the finest example of traditional Maldivian craftsmanship, with lacquered woodwork inside; dress modestly and ask permission before entering.

5

BEACH

Maafushi

A local island in South Malé Atoll that pioneered guesthouse tourism: affordable rooms, a designated bikini beach and day trips to sandbanks, snorkelling reefs and resort day passes, all a short speedboat ride from the airport.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Malé

≈ 211,000 people

One of the world's most densely packed capitals: walk the fish market, the coral-stone Old Friday Mosque and Sultan Park, then cross the bridge to Hulhumalé's beach and cafés.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Addu City

≈ 25,000 people

The southernmost atoll, its islands linked by causeways, with the former RAF base on Gan, the Eydhigali Kilhi wetlands and diving on the wartime wreck of the British Loyalty.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Kulhudhuffushi

≈ 10,000 people

The main town of the northern atolls, a regional hub with a hospital, harbour and domestic airport; few tourists come, so it shows everyday island life rather than resort polish.

Malé's figure includes Hulhumalé and Villimalé, which form part of the capital; every other settlement in the country is a small island town.

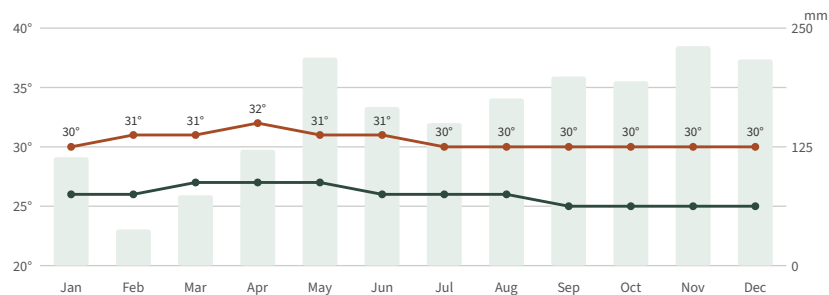
When to go to Maldives

Best time: **Jan–Apr.**



Average climate in Malé

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Kuda Eid (Eid al-Fitr) The end of Ramadan brings family feasts, new clothes, traditional games and bodu beru drumming; during Ramadan itself, local-island cafés close by day and services slow down.
Jul	Independence Day On 26 July Malé marks independence from British protection in 1965 with parades, school performances, fireworks and national flags draped across buildings.

How much does Maldives cost?

SHOESTRING £70 per person / day ≈ MVR 1,444 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £200 per person / day ≈ MVR 4,126 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £600 per person / day ≈ MVR 12,377 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
---	--	---

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Mas huni The classic breakfast: shredded smoked tuna mixed with grated coconut, onion, lime and chilli, scooped up with warm roshi flatbread and sweet black tea.	Garudhiya A clear, fragrant tuna broth, the everyday staple of island life, eaten with rice, lime, chilli and onion.	Hedhikaa Teatime short eats such as bis keemiya (tuna and cabbage pastries), gulha (fried tuna dumplings) and masroshi, sold in Malé's cafés every afternoon.
---	--	---

Getting around

Everything starts at Velana International Airport on Hulhulé, linked to Malé by bridge. Resorts collect guests by speedboat (nearby atolls) or Trans Maldivian Airways seaplane, which flies in daylight only, while Maldivian and Manta Air domestic flights serve distant atolls. MTCC public ferries link Malé with inhabited islands cheaply but slowly, with few Friday sailings; shared speedboats are faster. Most islands are small enough to walk.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C D G 230V — UK plugs fit	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 102 Fire: 118 Police: 119 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +960	TIME ZONE UTC+5 (standard time)
TAP WATER Varies — bottled or filtered is safer	DRIVING On the left

TIPPING

Resorts add a 10% service charge plus taxes; extra tips for room hosts, dive guides and boat crews at the end of a stay are appreciated, usually in US dollars.

ETIQUETTE

On local islands, cover shoulders and knees, swim modestly outside designated bikini beaches and avoid public displays of affection; alcohol is served only on resorts and liveaboards.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Velana International Airport (MLE), Malé

Visas & entry for Maldives

Shown for a British passport.

Visa on arrival

You will get a 30-day visa on arrival if you enter Maldives as a tourist.

If you intend to work in Maldives, you must get a work visa before you travel.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Measles

Bat Lyssavirus

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Maldives

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Tue 3 Nov 2026	Victory Day
Wed 11 Nov 2026	Republic Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 8 Feb 2027	First Day of Ramadan (date may shift)

Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr Holiday (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr Holiday (date may shift)
Sat 1 May 2027	International Worker's Day
Sat 15 May 2027	Day of Arafah (date may shift)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha Holiday (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha Holiday (date may shift)
Wed 19 May 2027	Eid al-Adha Holiday (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Mon 26 Jul 2027	Independence Day
Tue 3 Aug 2027	National Day (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)
Thu 2 Sep 2027	The Day Maldives Embraced Islam (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Dhivehi

ENGLISH	DHIVEHI	SAY IT
Hello	ހަލްސަވަދު ހަލާކުމް	ah-sah-LAH-moo ah-LAY-kum
Thank you	ސުލަބަދު	shoo-koo-REE-yah
Please	އަދަދު ސަލާމް	AH-days KOFF-ah
Excuse me	މަހަހުފް ބަލާމް	mah-AHF koo-RAY
How much is this?	މިއަދު ފަލަވަލު ދަގަހު؟	MEE-geh AH-goo kee-HAH-vah-reh

Know before you go

- Check transfer costs before booking: a seaplane or long speedboat ride can add hundreds of US dollars per person, turning a cheap room rate into an expensive stay.
- Bring US dollars in small notes for guesthouse islands and tips; resorts take cards, but ATMs are scarce outside Malé, Hulhumalé and Addu.
- Alcohol, pork products and pornography can't be imported; customs X-ray all bags on arrival and hold confiscated alcohol until you leave, so keep the receipt.