



# North & South Male' Atolls

At the centre of the country, the two atolls either side of Vaadhoo Kandu are the focal point of Maldivian tourism, where the first resorts cautiously developed in the 1970s. Today they're home to the Maldives' main international airport as well as many of the country's most famous and best-established island resorts.

The lively national capital, Male', the economic and political centre of the country, lies between North and South Male' Atolls, and yet it's hard to imagine anywhere much more pristine than the islands that surround its bustle. The nature of Maldivian geography means that, once you leave the area around the capital and the airport, you're immediately in a desert island paradise, even in the most developed part of the country.

Some excellent dive sites are found on these atolls, despite the coral bleaching caused by El Niño back in the 1990s. Some of the most interesting sites are on either side of Vaadhoo Kandu, the channel that runs between North and South Male' Atolls. At the outer edge of the atolls, the dive sites are accessible from only a few resorts or by safari boat, and you'll probably have them all to yourself. Gaafaru Falhu Atoll, north of North Male' Atoll, has at least three diveable shipwrecks. Some of the Maldives' best surf breaks are also in North Male' Atoll, and this is home to a small, seasonal surfer scene.

North and South Male' Atolls will be where most people experience the Maldives and both atolls are stunning visions of cobalt-blue water, white sand and island idyll – both worthy introductions to this extraordinary paradise.

## NORTH MALE' ATOLL

North and South Male' Atolls together are officially known as Kaafu Administrative District. The capital island is **Thulusdhoo**, on the eastern edge of North Male' Atoll, with a population of about 1150. Male' itself is not the capital as it is considered to be its own administrative district.

Thulusdhoo is an industrious island, known for *bodu beru* (big drums), traditional dancing and a government warehouse for salted fish. It is also unique for its Coca-Cola factory, the only one in the world where the drink is made from desalinated water.

The island of **Huraa** (population 850) is visited by tourists on island-hopping trips, but it's not yet as touristy as other North Male' islands. Huraa's dynasty of sultans, founded in 1759 by Sultan Al-Ghaazi Hassan Izzaddeen, built a mosque on the island.

Many tourists visit **Himmafushi** (population 1000) on excursions arranged from nearby resorts. The main street has two long rows of shops, where you can pick up some of the least expensive souvenirs in the country. Carved rosewood manta rays, sharks and dolphins are made locally. If you wander into the back streets, you quickly get away from the tourist strip to find an attractive, well-kept village with many modern amenities, including an attractive cemetery with coral headstones.

A sand spit has joined Himmafushi to the once separate island of **Gaamaadhoo**, where there used to be a prison. The surf break here, aptly called **Jailbreaks**, is a great right-hander, accessible by boat from nearby resorts.

Further north, **Dhiffushi** is one of the most appealing local islands, with approximately 760 people, three mosques and two schools.

