

Directory

CONTENTS

Accommodation	169
Business Hours	170
Children	170
Climate Chart	171
Courses	171
Customs	171
Dangers & Annoyances	171
Embassies & Consulates	172
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	172
Holidays	172
Insurance	173
Internet Access	173
Legal Matters	173
Maps	173
Marriage Ceremonies	173
Money	174
Post	175
Solo Travellers	175
Telephone	176
Time	176
Toilets	176
Tourist Information	176
Travel Permits	176
Travellers With Disabilities	177
Visas	177
Women Travellers	178

ACCOMMODATION

Ouch. That's most people's reaction to Maldivian resort prices, and it's fair to say this is not and will never be a cheap place to stay. Even budget hotels cost more than a top-end place in India or Sri Lanka, but quality in general is superior to elsewhere in Asia.

In this book we list accommodation for each chapter, divided into three groups: budget, midrange and top end. For each option a bed-and-breakfast room rate is quoted for the height of the season (mid-Jan to April) unless otherwise stated. In Male', however, breakfast is only included in the room price where indicated. There are almost no single rooms in resorts, so singles are nearly always doubles for single occupation. Where there is a separate price for singles, we list this, otherwise we just list the standard room price in the starting cat-

egory. As many travellers specifically want a water bungalow (a room on stilts over the water), we also list the starting category water bungalow price for two people in the height of the season.

Resorts

The vast majority of accommodation for travellers consists of the roughly 110 self-contained island resorts throughout the country. We list all the operating resorts in this book, as well as many that were refurbishing at the time of writing and those that are planned to open in the near future.

The long-standing 'one island, one resort' policy means that development is contained and nowhere in the country feels crowded. Each resort provides rooms, meals and activities for its guests, ranging from the most basic beach huts, with a buffet three times a day and a simple diving school, to vast water villas with every conceivable luxury in them, à la carte dining and all kinds of activities, from kiteboarding to big game fishing.

Most resorts have a range of room categories, so for the sake of ease we give the rate for the lowest category of room and for the lowest category of water bungalow (if available). However, be warned, these prices are nothing more than a guideline. They are rack rates, and so booking through a travel agent will get you access to far better deals and lower rates. The rack rates quoted are usually subject to an US\$8 per person per night government bed tax and a 10% service charge.

Budget resorts (up to US\$250 per double room per night) tend to be busier and more basic in their facilities and level of sophistication than more expensive resorts. Few budget resorts are being built these days so those that do exist tend to be dated from the 1980s or '90s, and are often in need of a lick of paint.

Midrange resorts (from US\$250 to US\$500 per night) make up the majority of the Maldives accommodation options. They are noticeably slicker, better run and have a better standard of facilities and accommodation, all carried off with some style.

Top-end resorts (more than US\$500 per night) are currently what the Maldives is all

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

about. The world-class standards are uniform in this category and range from the very good to the mind-bogglingly luxurious.

Booking resorts through travel agents is nearly always cheaper than doing so directly. However, with the (slow) rise of independent travel in the Maldives, some resorts offer great deals via their websites.

For our pick of the Maldives' best eco-friendly resorts, see p16.

Hotels

The only hotels currently operating in the country are located in Male'. As these are far cheaper than the island resorts, we've used a separate price breakdown for the capital's hotels: budget (under US\$50), midrange (US\$50 to US\$90) and top end (over US\$90). The choice is not inspiring and the rooms are often cramped due to the shortage of space (see p103).

At the time of writing new 'city hotels' were planned for many of the inhabited islands throughout the country. When these are functioning it will open up many previously closed islands to tourism, part of a new government plan to diversify the country's tourism industry, particularly with an eye to attracting more independent travellers.

Safari Boats

Live-aboard safari boats allow you to travel extensively throughout the country, visiting great dive sites, desert islands and small local settlements usually too remote to see travellers. Live-aboards also range from simple to luxury. The advantage is that you can visit many places off-limits to resort travellers, dive in pristine waters and enjoy a very sociable atmosphere. Prices range from bargain basement to exorbitant depending on the facilities available (see p64).

Inhabited Islands

There's at present no commercial accommodation in the island villages, and visitors are not legally permitted to pay for a place to stay. If for whatever reason you do stay on an inhabited island, you'll be put up in the house of the *kateeb* (island chief) or a house maintained for the purpose of accommodating guests.

BUSINESS HOURS

Male' is really the only place you have to worry about business hours in the Maldives, the resorts being far more flexible as they have to cater to hordes of visitors.

The working week elsewhere in the Maldives runs from Sunday to Thursday. Friday and Saturday are rest days and it's advisable to avoid Male' and local islands on these days as they are ghost towns. On workdays, businesses operate from 8am or 9am until 5pm or 6pm, but this varies. Shops in Male' will often stay open until around 10pm or 11pm, and some will shut in the heat of the afternoon – from midday until 3pm or thereabouts. Nearly all Male' businesses stop several times a day for prayers, which can be frustrating for shoppers, as businesses suddenly close for 15 minutes to half an hour. Most banks in Male' are open from about 8am to 1.30pm, Sunday to Thursday, or 9.30am to 12.30pm during Ramadan.

Government offices are open Sunday to Thursday from 7.30am to 2pm. During Ramadan, hours are from 9am to 1.30pm.

Teashops can open very early or close very late. During Ramadan the places where locals eat will probably be closed during daylight hours, but will bustle after dark.

CHILDREN

Younger children will enjoy a couple of weeks on a Maldivian resort island, particularly if they like playing in the water and on the beach. Although exotic cuisine is sometimes on the menu, there are always some pretty standard Western-style dishes that kids will find edible.

Older children and teenagers could find a resort a little confining after a few days and they may get bored. Canoeing and fishing trips might provide some diversion, while a course in sailing or windsurfing could be a great way to spend a holiday. Table tennis, tennis, volleyball or badminton might also