



North & South Male Atolls

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Why Go?

These atolls boast remote-feeling desert-island paradises and many of the country's most famous island resorts, despite also being home to the Maldives' main international airport.

Excellent dive sites pepper both sides of Vaadhoo Kandu, the channel that runs between North and South Male Atolls. At the outer edge of the atolls, dive sites can be explored 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. And some of the Maldives' best surf breaks are also in North Male Atoll, which 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

Tourism is well developed in North Male Atoll, and as well as having lots of resorts, there are several fledgling guesthouses here too. Male itself isn't the atoll capital, as it's considered to be its own administrative district. Instead, the atoll capital is **Thulusdhoo**, on the eastern edge of North Male Atoll, with a population of about 1150. Thulusdhoo is an industrious island, known for the manufacture of *bodu beru* (big drums), for its traditional dancing and for its salted-fish warehouse. 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 750) is well used to tourists visiting from nearby resorts, but it retains its small-island feel. 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 855) 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 and an attractive cemetery with coral headstones. There's a drug rehabilitation centre here and part of the island is off-limits due to this.

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 around 1000 inhabitants, three mosques and two schools. Mainly a fishing island, it has lots of greenery and grows tropical fruit. Tourists from Meeru Island Resort are regular visitors.



Activities

North Male Atoll has been well explored by divers and has some superb dive sites. Some are heavily dived, especially in peak seasons, due to the many resorts in the atoll. The following is just a sample of the best-known sites, listed from north to south.

Helengeli Thila

DIVING

Famous for its prolific marine life, Helengeli Thila, also called Bodu Thila, is a long narrow thila on the eastern edge of the atoll. Reef fish include surgeonfish, bannerfish, butterflyfish and dense schools of snapper and fusilier. Larger fish and pelagics (fish that inhabit the upper layers of the open sea) are also common – sharks, tuna, rays and jacks. Soft corals are spectacular in the cliffs and caves on the west side of the thila at about 25m. The large hard coral formations here are recovering from coral bleaching quite quickly, possibly because of the strong, nutrient-rich currents.

Shark Point

DIVING

Also called Saddle, or Kuda Faru, Shark Point is in a Protected Marine Area and is subject to strong currents. Lots of white-tip and grey-tip reef sharks can be seen in the channel between a thila and the reef, along with fusiliers, jackfish, stingrays and some impressive caves.

Blue Canyon

DIVING

The alternative, less-picturesque name of Blue Canyon is Kuda Thila, which means 'small thila'. A canyon, 25m to 30m deep and lined with soft, blue corals, runs beside the thila. The numerous overhangs make for an exciting dive; this is one for experienced divers.

Bodu Hithi Thila

DIVING

Bodu Hithi Thila is a prime manta-spotting site from December to March, with a good number of sharks and many reef fish. The soft corals on the sides of the thila are in excellent condition. If currents are moderate, this site is suitable for intermediate divers, and the shallow waters atop the thila offer superb snorkelling. Nearby, the **Peak** is another great place to see mantas in season; it is also home to some large Napoleon wrasse.

Rasfari

DIVING

The outer-reef slope of Rasfari drops down to a depth of more than 40m, but a couple of thilas rise up to about 25m. Grey-tip reef sharks love it here – you might see 20 or 30 of them, as well as white-tip sharks, barracuda, eagle rays and trevally. It's a Protected Marine Area.

Colosseum

DIVING

A curving cliff near a channel entrance forms the Colosseum, where pelagics do the performing. Sharks and barracuda are often seen here. Experienced divers do this as a drift dive, going right into the channel past ledges and caves, with soft corals and the occasional turtle. Even beginners can do this one in good conditions.

Aquarium

DIVING

As the name suggests, Aquarium (a coral rock formation about 15m down) features a large variety of reef fish. A sandy bottom at 25m can have small sharks and rays, and you might also see giant wrasse and schools of snapper. It's an easy dive and is suitable for snorkelling.

Kani Corner

DIVING

Across the kandu from the Aquarium, Kani Corner is the start of a long drift dive through a narrow channel with steep sides, past caves and overhangs decorated with soft corals. Lots of large marine life can be seen, including sharks, barracuda, Napoleon wrasse and tuna. Beware of fast currents.

HP Reef

DIVING

Also called Rainbow Reef or Girifushi Thila, HP Reef sits beside a narrow channel where currents provide much nourishment for incredibly rich growths of soft, blue corals, and support a large variety of reef fish and pelagics. The formations include large blocks, spectacular caves and a 25m vertical, swim-through chimney. It is a Protected Marine Area.