



North & South Male Atolls

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Why Go?

North & South Male Atolls are home to many of the country's most famous and best-established resorts, and all the islands here are within easy reach of the capital city and the Maldives' international airport. South Male Atoll is also home to Maafushi, the single greatest success story of the Maldives recent attempt to encourage independent tourism on inhabited islands, and where there are now dozens of guesthouses, dive operators and even a foreigners' beach.

Both atolls have a wealth of natural draws too: excellent dive sites pepper both sides of Vaadhoo Kanduu, the channel that runs between North and South Male Atolls, while 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, which is home to a small, seasonal surfer scene, and the beaches are superb almost everywhere.

When to Go

- **May-Nov** The best months to surf North & South Male's excellent breaks
- **Dec-Mar** High season brings the best weather, with almost unbroken sunshine common for weeks at a time
- **Jan-Apr** Divers will experience the best visibility in the water at these times

North Male Atoll

Tourism is well developed in North Male Atoll, and in addition to the many resorts there are several guesthouses on inhabited islands 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 1200. Thulusdhoo is an industrious island, known for manufacturing of *bodu beru* (big drums), for its nascent surfer scene 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. It is now home to several guesthouses, so the tourist presence extends beyond day-trippers. 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 a picturesque, well-kept village and 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.

Further north, **Dhiffushi** is an appealing local island, with around 900 inhabitants. Mainly a fishing island, it has lots of greenery, grows tropical fruit, and is home to a couple of guesthouses.



Activities

North Male Atoll has some superb dive sites. Some are heavily dived, especially in peak seasons, due to the many resorts in the atoll.

★ 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 and pelagics (fish that inhabit the upper layers of the open sea) are common,

including sharks, tuna, rays and jacks. Soft corals are spectacular in the cliffs and caves on the west side of the thila at about 25m.

★ 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.

★ Manta Point

DIVING

The best time to see the mantas for which Manta Point is famous is from May to November. Coral outcrops at about 8m are a 'cleaning station', where cleaner wrasse feed on parasites from the mantas' wings. Cliffs, coral tables, turtles, sharks and numerous reef fish are other attractions, as are the nearby Lankan 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 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.

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.