

# Welcome to the Maldives

*Unrivalled luxury, stunning white-sand beaches and an amazing underwater world make the Maldives an obvious choice for a true holiday of a lifetime.*

## Unbelievable Beaches

The Maldives is home to perhaps the best beaches in the world; they're on almost every one of the country's nearly 1200 islands and are so consistently perfect that it's hard not to become blasé about them. While some beaches may boast softer granules than others, the basic fact remains: you'll find consistently whiter-than-white powder sand and luminous cyan-blue water like this almost nowhere else on earth. This fact alone is enough to bring over a million people a year to this tiny, remote and otherwise little-known Indian Ocean paradise.

## Resorts for All

Every resort in the Maldives is its own private island, and with over 100 to choose from the only problem is selecting where to stay. At the top end, the world's most exclusive hotel brands compete to attain ever-greater heights of luxury, from personal butlers and private lap pools to in-room massages and pillow menus. It's not surprising that honeymooners and those seeking a glamorous tropical getaway have the country at the top of their wish lists. But there's choice beyond the five- and six-star resorts. Other islands cater for families, for divers, for those on a (relative) budget, and anyone wanting a tranquil back-to-nature experience.

## Underwater World

With some of the best diving and snorkelling in the world, the clear waters of the Maldives are a magnet for anyone with an interest in marine life. The richness and variety is astonishing; dazzling coral walls, magnificent caves and schools of brightly coloured tropical fish await you when you get down to the reef. In deeper waters lurk manta rays, turtles, sharks and even the world's largest fish, the whale shark. The best bit? The water is so warm many people don't even wear a wetsuit.

## Independent Travel

In the last few years, these incredible islands have finally started to open to independent travellers, meaning you no longer have to stay in resorts and remain separate from the local population, something that has kept backpackers away for decades. Intrepid individuals can now make their own itineraries and travel from island to island by public ferry, staying among the devout but friendly local population. With a fast-growing number of privately run guesthouses on inhabited islands, the Maldives and its people are now more accessible than ever.



## Why I Love the Maldives

By Tom Masters, Author

I first came to the Maldives with no idea how different it was to the rest of the world, how fragile or challenging life seems here at the mercy of the sea, with so few resources locally available. I instantly formed a bond of respect and friendship with the people who make these inhospitable coral islands home. It's such a contradiction that this is also where to find some of the world's most luxurious hotel properties, and this is a paradox – among many – that I continue to enjoy every time I return to this astonishing, beautiful country.

**For more about our author, see page 192**