



Southern Atolls

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Best Guesthouses

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Why Go?

The southern atolls have been busy over the past few years as new resorts have been built on ever more atolls. With better transport infrastructure than the north of the country – there are five regional airports, all with multiple daily connections to the capital – it's surprising that tourism didn't catch on here sooner.

Outside the resorts, the southern atolls have mostly retained a traditional way of life. The exception is Gan, where the British established military facilities in WWII and maintained an air-force base that operated until 1976.

Development is continuing, with each atoll now hosting at least one resort, and several new guesthouses opening. Safari boats explore dive sites, and surfing trips visit the remotest breaks of Gaafu Dhaalu and Seenu Atolls. Welcome to the pristine islands of the southern Maldives.

When to Go

- ➔ **Dec-Apr** The best time to see manta rays swimming in the waters of the south.
- ➔ **Feb-Apr & Aug-Oct** Surf's up in Gaafu Dhaal and Seenu Atolls.
- ➔ **May-Nov** Great visibility makes this an excellent time to snorkel and dive.

Vaavu

Vaavu is made up of Felidhoo Atoll and the small, uninhabited Vattaru Falhu Atoll. This is the least populous area of the country, with around 2100 inhabitants spread over just five inhabited islands.

The main industry is fishing, and there is also some boat building. The capital island is **Felidhoo**, which has only about 500 people, but visitors are more likely to go to its neighbouring island, **Keyodhoo** (population 670), which has a good anchorage for safari boats. At the northern edge of the atoll, **Fulidhoo** (population 390) is an attractive island known for its boat building. **Rakeedhoo** (population 360), at the southern tip of the atoll, is used as an anchorage by safari boats taking divers to the nearby channel.



Activities

With over 25 dive sites in the atoll, and only three resorts in the area, you're unlikely to feel crowded when diving here. Some dive sites are not readily accessible, even from the resorts, and are mostly visited by safari boats. The following sites are rated among the best in the whole of the Maldives, and they all offer superb snorkelling.

★ Fotteyo

DIVING

Fotteyo is a brilliant diving and snorkelling site in and around a channel entrance – it's worth making several dives here. There are numerous small caves, several large caves and various arches and holes, all decorated with colourful soft corals. Rays, reef sharks, grouper, tuna, jackfish, barracuda, turtles and even hammerhead sharks can be seen. Inside, the channel floor is known as 'trig-fish alley'.

Vattaru Kandū

DIVING

A remote channel dive on the southern edge of Vattaru Falhu, Vattaru Kandū is now a designated Protected Marine Area. It is not too demanding unless the currents are running at full speed. The reef next to Vattaru is a fine snorkelling area. Around the entrance are many caves and overhangs with soft corals, sea fans and abundant fish life – barracuda, fusilier and white-tip reef sharks. Turtles are sometimes seen here, as are manta rays from December to April.

Devana Kandū

DIVING

This is a drift dive that's not too demanding, in a channel divided by a narrow thila.

Devana Kandū is a great snorkelling area too. There are several entrances to the channel, which has overhangs, caves, reef sharks and eagle rays. The southern side has soft corals and lots of reef fish. Further in, the passages join up and there is a broad area of hard corals, the deeper parts being less affected by bleaching.

Rakeedhoo Kandū

DIVING

Rakeedhoo Kandū is a challenging dive in a deep channel – the east and west sides are usually done as separate drift dives. Broad coral shelves cover overhangs and caves, which have sea fans and black corals. Turtles, Napoleon wrasse, sharks and schools of trevally are often seen, and the snorkelling on the reef top is brilliant.



Sleeping

Casa Barabaru

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 790 4997; www.barabaru.com; Thinaadhoo; r from US\$99; ☎ @) This Italian-run guesthouse on the charming island of Thinaadhoo is a great place for an island holiday. Accommodation is in two comfortable rooms with rustic wooden fittings and modern bathrooms, and the sea is just 50m away. Due to the Italian owners, it's particularly popular with independent Italian travellers (but some English is spoken).

It's also popular with travellers wishing to fish – night fishing and deep-sea fishing are all available. Good meals and an enthusiastic team are the main highlights of a trip here, as are the nearby great beaches, which can be visited easily on day trips.



Getting There & Away

Vaavu is easily reached by ferry from Male's Viligili Terminal. Ferries (Rf22, two hours) to the northerly island of Fulidhoo leave Male at 10am on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, stopping off at Maafushi on the way, and return from Fulidhoo at 11am on Saturday, Monday and Wednesday. From Fulidhoo, it's possible to connect to the other inhabited islands in the atoll daily except Friday. See www.mtcc.com.mv for timetables.

Meemu

Meemu Atoll has eight inhabited islands and three resorts. The capital island is **Muli** (population 850), a small and traditional island with little to attract visitors. Nearby **Mulah** and more southerly **Kolhufushi** are both more populous with about 1450 and