

General Information

The Republic of the Maldives is a chain of around 1200 islands stretching 750km across the Indian Ocean with the northernmost island at 7° 06" N and the southernmost island just crossing the Equator at 04° 42" S.

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The tiny islands are geographically grouped into ring shaped reefs called "atolls" and there are 26 of these atoll formations. An atoll encloses a central lagoon with a flat, sandy bottom at a relatively shallow depth of 40-100m. The outer reef, which forms many of the islands, is often broken by deep channels that allow oceanic water to flow into and out of the central lagoon. Inside the atoll there are numerous smaller ring shaped reefs and tillas.

Of the 1200 islands only 200 are inhabited by local Maldivian people, 88 islands have been developed as tourist resorts and the remaining islands are uninhabited.

Inhabited islands are either tourist resorts or inhabited by locals and it is a Government ruling that there can be no combination of the two.

While there are 26 geographical atolls, tourists are most likely to see just 11 of these as the Maldivian Government has taken steps to restrict the impact of tourism on the local community. Tourists can only be accommodated on registered tourist islands with quite strict regulations governing tourist visits to uninhabited and fishing islands.

The tourist development area has been restricted to the seven atolls of North Male, South Male, Ari, Felidhu, Baa, Lhaviyani and Addu Atoll. In 1997 the Government announced the proposed development of 14 new islands opening the atolls of Meemu, Faafu, Dhaalu and Raa to tourism.

The People

The Maldives has been a crossroads for sea traders for many centuries and the origin of the people of the country is mixed. Not much is known of the early history of the island people but the language and some archaeological finds of Buddhist relics indicate that the early settlers were from the southern Indian continent and the Buddhist Singalese from Sri Lanka. Now, of course, the Maldives population of 240,000 is entirely Muslim.

Today, the Maldives is a democratic republic with President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom at the helm. There is no party political system in the Maldives: the citizens Majlis (parliament) comprises 48 members, two elected from each atoll and eight nominated by the President. The president himself is nominated by the citizens' Majlis and elected by public referendum for a renewable five year period; the president then appoints his own cabinet.

History

- 1153: Islam was adopted after the visit of a Muslim saint
- 1513: Male attacked by the Portuguese from their colony in Goa, India. They built a fort in 1518. The Portuguese were thrown out shortly afterwards.
- 1558: Male captured again by the Portuguese who remained there until they were all killed by the Maldivian Hero, Muhammad Takurufanu.
- 1609: Male was attacked by pirates who killed the Sultan and caused considerable damage.
- 1631: The Portuguese attempted to storm Male but failed and were driven off with great losses.
- 1649: Further attempt to take Male by Portuguese, driven off by heavy cannon fire from the fort.
- 1752: Male attacked by the Ali Raja of Malabar in a fleet of ships. After setting fire to many of the buildings and ransacking the palace, the pirates stayed for a few months until the Maldivians under the leadership of Hassan Manikufanu threw them out. The Ali Raja continued to lay siege to Male until eventually driven away with the help of a fleet of French Men O'War under the command of Monsieur Termellier. He was known with affection by the Maldivians as Moustri Mili and is buried on Male.
- 1761: A further assault by the fleet of Ali Raja which was beaten off by a brave attack using "dhonis".
- 1818-19 A great famine occurred all over the islands and a massive tornado struck devastating many islands, homes and boats.
- 1835: The first survey of the islands was undertaken by the British Admiralty under the command of Robert

Moresby.

- 1887: The Maldives and Great Britain signed an agreement which gave the country the status of a protected state.
- 1932: The first written constitution of the Maldives was proclaimed.
- 1953: First Republic declared.
- 1953: Republic dissolved and the Sultanate re-established
- 1965: End of British agreement. Independence and entry into the United Nations.
- 1968: Declaration of second republic
- 1976: British complete withdrawal of all forces from the South of the country.