

Itinerary Sample

Dive Sites in the Maldives Islands

In the many atolls of the Maldives there is no end to the number of different dive sites with still many more to be discovered. Here are descriptions of some of the sites that give you an idea of the type and quality of the diving.

7 Nights/ 5.5 Dive Days

North Male Atoll: Lion's Head - Wattaru Kandu - Lankanfinolhu Faru (Manta Point)

South Male Atoll: Cocoa Thila - Guraidhoo Kandu South

Ari Atoll: Kudarah Thila - Hukrueli Faru (Madivaru)

NORTH MALE ATOLL

Lion's Head

This is a thrilling dive. You can see schooling grey reef shark as well as some superb soft corals and a mass of colourful reef life. The overhang, shaped like a lion's head, is the pinnacle of a natural break in the reef which interrupts the tidal flow and causes upwellings.

The reef top is at 3m (10ft) and shelves off steeply to 40m (130ft), before plunging into the depths. There are caves and overhangs in the first 25m (80ft). From the point of entry, where most of the sharks are seen, you can follow the reef either east or west depending on the direction of the current. On the reef wall, you find a huge variety of invertebrates and fishes. Look out for the unusual leaf fish and the false stone fish. Hawksbill turtles are common. Resorts used to shark feed here. The site is now a Protected Marine Area as designated by the Maldivian Government.

Wattaru Kandu

This site is best dived when the tide is flowing into the atoll. The reef is marked by a small sandbank, and the shallow reef top is clearly visible. You descend on the ocean side of the channel towards the atoll bed at 30m (100ft), keeping the reef on your right.

The best part of the dive is a section of large, broken rocks that form a crevice running up the reef at an angle of 45°. Here you can see stingrays in the sand on the channel floor, white tip reef sharks and a meadow of garden eels.

Lankanfinolhu Faru (Manta Point)

In the southwest season an astonishing number of manta rays can be seen here when they come in to be cleaned. The top of the reef is at 12m (40ft); the reef then slopes gently down to 40m (130ft). It is interspersed with massive porites corals that are home to the colonies of cleaner fish.

The manta rays come in from the deep water and hover over the coral heads while the wrasse set to work. To ensure the best sighting you need to be patient and position yourself close to, but not on top of, the coral heads. If you do not crowd the mantas they will perform their cleaning ritual in front of your eyes. It is common for encounters to last half an hour or more, but if you try to touch the mantas you will scare them away. Should you be unlucky enough not to see mantas, this is still a tremendous dive site: huge schools of bulls eye fish, oriental sweet lips and napoleon wrasse, plus heaps of turtles and various species of moray eels.

SOUTH MALE ATOLL

Cocoa Thila

This can be a very rewarding dive, although challenging. As with many thila dives, it is best done when there is a moderate current; if the current is too strong it becomes difficult to stay on the dive site; conversely, if there is no current there are few fish.

The western end of this thila, which is 400m (440yd) long, has steeply sloping sides undercut down to 30m (100ft) by large caves and overhangs. This is where you see the main action, principally trevallies, tuna and eagle rays. Lying off this point are three huge coral rocks and smaller coral outcrops. The current flowing around these rocks creates a cauldron of activity, with a mass of rock cod, oriental sweet lips and just about every other reef fish you can think of. There are caves and overhangs along both north and south sides of the thila. At another big coral outcrop on the northern side, 200m (220yd) from the point, grey reef shark are often seen.

Guraidhoo Kandu South

This site is well known for sightings of grey reef sharks and eagle rays. The break in the atoll rim south of Guraidhoo is a complex structure of two channels with a large reef in the middle. The southern channel, Guraidhoo kandu, is 300m (330yd) across, and has sheer sides; its sea bed meets the ocean drop of at 35m (115ft). Jump in on the outer reef of the south corner and drift with the current into the atoll.

Most of the pelagic action can be observed on the ocean drop off, where the oceanic water enters the channel.. Inside the channel, all along the reef wall, are overhangs with plenty of sea fans and black coral bushes. Keep an eye open for the family of friendly and curios napoleon wrasse that patrols the reef.

ARI ATOLL

Kudarah Thila

The topography here is quite complex. The thila is divided into four large coral heads, of varying sizes, that sit on a plateau rising from 40m (130ft) to 12m (40ft). The thila is no more than 100m (110yd) in diameter, and you can swim around the whole site in a single dive. Each of the blocks is undercut from 15m (50ft) to 25m (80ft) with superb caves jammed full of soft corals, gorgonians and whip corals.

On the southwest corner is an archway swim-through, and between all four pinnacles there are deep ravines that harbour a stunning amount of marine life. The centre of the thila is hollowed out, with a base at 20m (65ft), and thousands of blue-lined snapper school in the gullies that have been created. Watch out for yellow trumpet fish shadowing the snappers while hunting on the reef. Grey and white tip sharks can be seen on the current points. This is a Protected Marine Area.

Hukrueli Faru (Madivaru)

Madi means 'ray' in Dhivehi. In the northeast season this is a superb manta ray cleaning station. As with many good manta points, the reef slopes down gently from its top at 8m (25ft) to the atoll floor at 30m (100ft). Although there are many cleaning stations along this 1km (? mile) reef, the area where the mantas are most active is midway along the northern side.

A deep basin, almost 100m (110yd) across has formed in the coral, and, as the currents flow out of the atoll, the waters eddy in the basin. This attracts the mantas, which hover like great spaceships in the current. To the east of the basin the reef forms a wall which drops steeply down to the sand floor at 30m (100ft). At a depth of 25m (80ft) there is a large cave running along the reef for 200m (220yd).

Maaya thila

A Protected Marine Area, this offers one of the best-known dives in the Maldives. There is a remarkable variety of marine life on the thila, including grey reef sharks, white tip sharks, turtles, stonefish, frogfish, zebra morays, batfish and many, many more species. The thila is small enough - 30m (33yd) in diameter - that you can swim around it easily in a single dive but, as always, it is the point of the current that concentrates the underwater activity.

Jumping onto the top of the thila at 8m (25ft), and swimming due north you come to the edge of the thila, where there is a large coral overhang full of bright orange Tubastrea corals. At this point, looking out into the blue, you will see a satellite rock which is worth exploring. The top of the rock, at 15m (50ft), is covered in colourful soft corals. The vertical side of the rock drop down to the atoll plate at 40m (130ft). In this channel between the satellite rock and the thila, grey reef sharks often patrol and we have seen guitar shark here on a number of occasions.