

# go... on a short break in... the maldives

People think of this tropical playground as a big bucket-list holiday but, as Sarah Harvey explains, there are affordable quick getaways just a short hop from the capital Malé

Maldives? Tick. Now just 99 more items left on the bucket list



There's no need to venture far from the international arrivals hub of Malé to find an affordable slice of paradise.

The Maldives' busy capital is the country's centre of commerce, and there are hotels aplenty, but just one (artificial) beach. This is no picture-postcard city; occupying just 2.2 sq km, it's the world's second most densely populated island, housing more than 100,000 residents, and the polar opposite of the idyllic islands surrounding it.

But use Malé as a jumping-off point to get to the neighbouring islands in Malé Atoll, and you can reach practically every island by boat in under an hour, a significantly cheaper trip than flying on a seaplane. In Malé Atoll alone there's a dizzying number of islands to stay on, so – depending on

what you want from your holiday – break them down into resort islands and inhabited islands. The major difference is that there's just one resort for every resort island (with no local inhabitants), while each inhabited island has just one settlement, but multiple guesthouses. There are several good-value three-star resorts where guests can sip mojitos on the beach for under US\$200 per night.

Staying on inhabited islands costs between \$40 and \$150 per night, and is an easy way to experience the local culture. Unlike the resorts, alcohol and bikini sunbathing are prohibited for guests staying among Sunni Muslim communities, though there are some exceptions to the swimwear ban.

Prices vary, but here's a pick of some of the most wallet-friendly islands close to Malé »



## EMBUDU VILLAGE RESORT

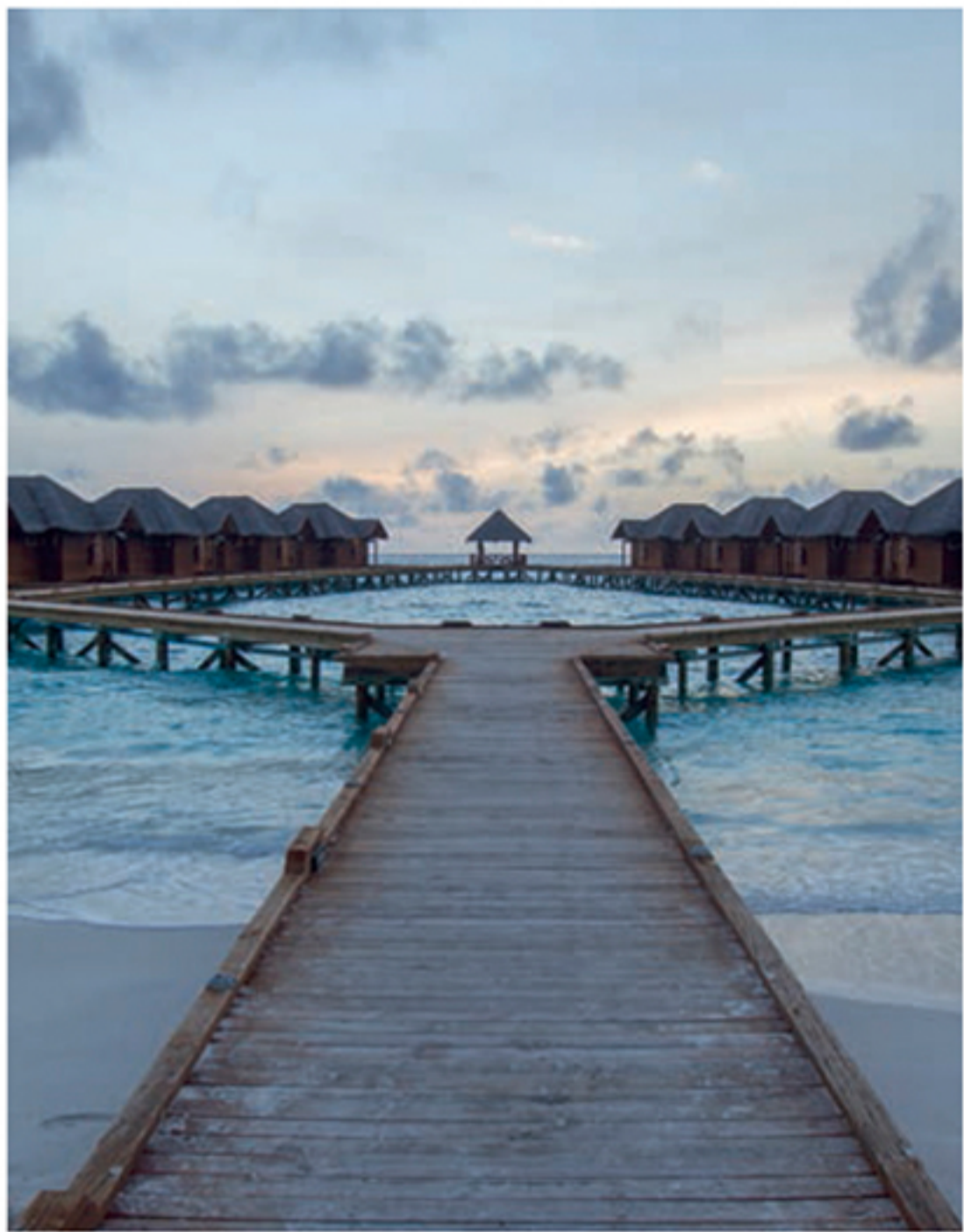
This recently refurbished resort is legendary for its proximity to superb dive sites, including Emboodhu Express, where currents can reach up to five knots. The waters attract large marine life; drift dives can yield sightings of white-tip reef sharks, grey reef sharks, eagle rays, stingrays, barracudas and even the occasional hammerhead. For a more serene experience, snorkel on the vibrant house reef or hire a catamaran. Guests can upgrade to all-inclusive at a daily rate of just \$34 per person.

**South Malé Atoll. Room rate: \$260 full board; transfers: \$36 motor yacht each way, 20 mins; tel: +960 664 0063**

## FIHALHOHI ISLAND RESORT

Coconut palm-thatched roofs, turquoise lagoon, a name that's hard to pronounce – Fihalhohi has everything an island paradise should have. The rooms are spacious and the cuisine ranges from all around the world, making it excellent value. Romantics will love the tranquil atmosphere and exotic jungle foliage. There are sandbank excursions, watersports and a colourful house reef to explore.

**South Malé Atoll. Room rate: \$191 full board; transfers: \$77.50 speedboat each way, 40 mins; tel: +960 664 2903**



## GURAI DHOO

Like most Maldivian settlements, the town is a little rough about the edges aesthetically speaking, but the azure water and white sand, combined with the warmth of the residents, are adequate compensation. Watch traditional craftsmen at work, see how boats are built or spend a day with anglers handline fishing. There's a dive centre, sunbathing area and excursions including day trips to resorts. In the heart of the island, Sun Suites has air-conditioned rooms and rock-bottom rates, while the beachfront IslandWay Etos offers resort-quality luxury beds and linen, unique cultural activities and a self-catering option. The staff will regale you with tales about the Maldives and local folklore.

**South Malé Atoll. Room rate: \$40-\$120; \$3 public ferry from Malé, 1 hr 45 mins, 2pm daily except Fridays; \$100 speedboat, 30 mins; IslandWay Etos, tel: +960 300 0077; Sun Suites, tel: +960 985 4208**

## RASDHOO ISLAND

Diving at dawn with hammerheads is a truly exhilarating experience, and Rasdhoo is the number one place in the Maldives to do it. The island may be only half a kilometre long, and barely that in width, but you can fish, sail and windsurf. It also boasts one of the prettiest lagoons in the country. The beachside Rasdhoo Inn is welcoming and exceedingly well run (owner Hussain is one of the best in the business). Splash out on a seaplane transfer for the ultimate low-flying experience over the tiny islands in a de Havilland DH-6 Twin Otter, which lands on the water on floats.

**North Ari Atoll, transfers: \$40 express ferry, 1 hr; \$5 public ferry, 3 hrs, departs Sunday, Monday & Wednesday at 9am, Tuesday & Thursday at 11am; \$245 seaplane charter, 20 mins; Rasdhoo Inn, \$50 rooms, tel: +960 797 3501**



## MAAFUSHI

Maafushi is one of the best islands for social butterflies, as it has the largest concentration of guesthouses and travellers in the country. As such, you might see more foreign faces than local ones. Competition among hostel owners is extremely fierce, so travellers benefit from affordable room rates, dive trips, spa treatments and excursions. Try the professional-but-fun team at Maafushi Dive Centre to see if you can combine dive trips with lodgings, or check out independent Maldives travel specialists Otherwayholiday.com. Glitzy boutique hotels with ocean views are plentiful too, such as Arena Beach Hotel, which even has a rooftop hot tub.

**South Malé Atoll. Room rate: \$40-\$150; transfers: \$3 public ferry from Malé, 1 hr 30 mins, 3pm daily except Fridays; \$100 speedboat, 30 mins, Maafushi Dive Centre, tel: +960 991 1116; Arena Beach Hotel, tel: +960 793 3231**



**TIGERAIR FLIES TO MALÉ FOUR TIMES A WEEK.**

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Opět mi bylo ctí poskytnout informace a fotografie pro článek do inflight magazínu Tiger Tales / May 2015, který vydává nízkonákladová letecká společnost Tiger Airways ze Singapuru. Článek napsala skvělá Sarah Harvey ze soukromých maledivských medií Manta Media.