

USEFUL INFORMATION

– MALDIVES –



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HISTORY

Geological Origins Of Maldives

Millions of years ago a great range of volcanoes rose from the floor of the Indian Ocean and burst through its surface. Gradually the volcanoes sank back into the depths leaving only small coral reefs in the vast expanse of the sea that are known today as The Republic of Maldives, the wonder of the Indian Ocean...

First Inhabitants

The origins of Maldivian history are lost back in to time. Archaeological findings indicate that the islands were inhabited as early as 1500 BC, and there are tales of a legendary people called the Redin who may have been among the earliest of the explorers. The early Maldivians were probably Buddhists or Hindus migrating from the Indian subcontinent.

Early Travellers

The first reference to Maldives is in the second-century writings of the Greek astronomer, mathematician and geographer, "Ptolemy". The great Arab travellers who crossed the Indian Ocean were the Persian Sulaiman merchants, who lived in the 9th Century. The Chinese were also among the early great navigators dating from around the fifth century BC. In comparison with Eastern civilizations the Europeans were latecomers to the Indian Ocean.

Conversion To Islam

Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveller who visited the Maldives in the 14th century recorded an interesting legend on how the country converted to Islam. Abul Barakaath Yoosuf Al Barbary, an Islamic scholar, visited the Maldives during a time when people lived in fear of the "Rannamaari", a sea-demon, who came out of the sea once a month threatening to destroy everything unless a virgin was sacrificed. When the King found out that the demon had been defeated through the power of the Holy Quran he embraced Islam and ordered all his subjects to follow him.

The Colonials

The Portuguese mariners and traders demanded a share of the profitable Indian Ocean trade routes.

In 1517 Sultan Kalhu Muhammad signed a treaty which allowed the Portuguese to establish a trading post in Male. When it was burnt down the following year (with the help of corsairs from Malabar), a Portuguese armada landed 120 men in Male to establish a fort.

In 1887, the Maldives became a British protectorate, where the British ensured the defense of the Maldives yet were not involved in any way with the governing of the country. This close relationship with the British ensured a period of peace and freedom from foreign interference. During the Second World War, the British had forward bases in the north and south of the archipelago and in 1957 the Royal Air Force - RAF established a base in the island of Gan in Addu Atoll. This airbase was closed in 1967.

General

The Maldives are located in the Indian Ocean, southwest of the southern tip of India and are made up of 26 atolls that include a total of 1,190 small coral islands that cover a total of 298 sq km. Out of these, 200 are inhabited. The largest city in the Maldives is also the capital, Male, which contains almost a third of the country's population. The current total population of the Maldives is 379,174 (July 2008). The national currency is the Rufiyaa, with 12.75 Rufiyaa being equal to US\$1. The main supporters of the Maldivian economy are fishing, tourism and shipping.

Language

The local language of the Maldivians is Dhivehi with a base of Sanskrit, while also being strongly influenced by other major languages of the region including Indian, Arabian and African.

The Maldivian script is called Thaana and consists of 24 letters which are written from right to left. It was invented during the 16th century.

TRANSPORTATION

There are no restrictions on foreign nationals entering the country. Visas are not needed for visits of 30 days or less. The Maldives has two international Airports: Male International Airport and Gan International Airport. Male International Airport, is located on the island of Hulhule', 2km across the water from the capital.

There is no national carrier; the carriers serving Male can roughly be divided into scheduled and charter airlines. Some airlines only fly in certain seasons and the list of charter airlines changes frequently. Transport within Maldives is usually by speed boat and also, unique to Maldives, the famous Air Taxi.

Most travellers in the Maldives are far more likely to use the services of the two charter seaplane companies, Trans Maldivian and Maldivian Air Taxi both of which fly tourists from the seaplane port next to Male' International Airport to resorts throughout the country. All seaplane transfers are made during daylight hours, and offer an amazing perspective on the atolls, islands, reefs and lagoons. Charter flights for sightseeing, photography and emergency evacuation can be arranged.

Call both companies for rates and availability. Note that cargo capacity on the seaplanes is limited. All passengers and baggage are weighed before loading, and some heavy items may have to wait for a later flight or be transferred by boat.

ATTRACTIONS

Maldives offers many attractions the most popular being: secluded Island Resorts, Boat trips, Diving & Snorkeling, Water Sports, and SPA.

A visit to the Maldives is incomplete without experiencing the realms of the underwater world. Being one of the best diving destinations in the world, the Maldives offers diving opportunities for the beginner as well as for the more experienced diver.

All the resorts are PADI (and some are NAUI and BISAC) accredited. Most resorts require you to do a check-dive, and will want to see your logbook, so remember to take this or certification cards with you. Equipment is well-maintained and it is compulsory at most resorts to dive with computers (which can be hired).

You don't have to be a diver to enjoy the fascinating underwater world of Maldives. A snorkel, mask and fin is your passport to enrich your holiday experience and to encounter different species of playful fish, turtles, and other curious creatures that may be residing in the house reef.