

DIVE FOR FUN · EXPEDITIONS

MALDIVES · NOVEMBER 2026

A country of corals

A guide to the central atolls of the Maldives: how an atoll is born, why the current is the attraction and what lives on the other side of the channel

Dive For Fun®

Gabriel Vieira Costa

DIVE FOR FUN PRESENTS

A country of corals

Geology, monsoon, marine life and diving in the central atolls of the Maldives

ENGLISH EDITION

MALDIVES EXPEDITION 2026

SÃO PAULO · BRAZIL

A country of corals
A guide to the central atolls of the Maldives. First Portuguese edition, August 2026. Second Portuguese edition, revised and expanded, October 2026. English edition translated from the second edition, October 2026.

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Photography: every underwater and surface photograph in this book is by **Gabriel Vieira Costa**, taken in the Maldives in **November 2024**, in the same region and in the same month as this expedition. There are no stock images in this book: what is here is what you see there, at that time of year, in that light.

About the sources. Every number, date and scientific name came from a published, verifiable source: peer-reviewed oceanographic and biological literature, official data from the government of the Maldives, the IUCN Red List, the Manta Trust and technical material from those who operate in the atolls. The full list is in the Sources appendix. Where the sources disagree, the book says they disagree.

About the dive sites. The central atolls route is not fixed. The operator sets the sequence each week according to monsoon, current, tide and boat traffic. The sites described here are the ones that appear most often on that route, not a promise.

Centro de Mergulho Aquadive by Dive For Fun Ltda.
CNPJ 38.352.485/0001-55
Av. Pedroso de Morais 487, Pinheiros, São Paulo/SP
diveforfun.com.br

"We are not going to die quietly."

MOHAMED NASHEED, PRESIDENT OF THE MALDIVES, AT THE CLIMATE VULNERABLE FORUM, MALÉ, NOVEMBER 2009

MALDIVES EXPEDITION · 14 TO 21 NOVEMBER 2026

For those who go at the right time

The Maldives are not a place, they are a window. November closes the south-west monsoon, the water clears and the mantas are still there. This book is for the twelve people who understood that and bought the ticket.

- Alberto Afonso Monteiro
- Aline Serpeloni
- Amanda Simões Fernandes
- Eduarda Baccarin Ferrari
- Gabriel Vieira Costa
- Glória Lima Portella
- Melissa Jane Kia
- Piyali Chaudhury
- Priscila Arão
- Ronaldo Golcman
- Silvia Rachel de Andrade Cabral
- Thaís Togni

*And to the crew of the **BlueForce 3** and to the dive guides who read the current before you enter the water.*

THIS COPY BELONGS TO

A letter to those who are going

There is one number about the Maldives worth keeping in mind before any other: **the country has 298 square kilometers of dry land scattered across 90,000 square kilometers of ocean**. Less than half a percent of that is ground. The rest is water.

This is not almanac trivia. It is the explanation for everything. For why the culture is maritime, for why the currency was once a cowrie shell, for why the entire country sits a meter and a half above sea level, and for why diving there works in a way it works nowhere else.

The part almost nobody explains before the trip is that last one. In the Maldives you do not dive on a reef: you dive in a **channel**. Each atoll is a ring of coral with passages linking the inner lagoon to the open ocean, and twice a day the tide pushes an absurd volume of water through those passages. Where the water accelerates, the plankton concentrates. Where the plankton concentrates, the small fish appear, then the schools, then the sharks and the mantas.

Current, there, is not an obstacle. Current is the reason.

Understanding this changes the whole trip. You stop fighting the water and start positioning yourself in it. You understand why the dive guide insists on descending fast and on the right side of the channel, why the reef hook is equipment and not a luxury, and why the best dive of the week will probably be the one where you spent twenty minutes hooked onto a rock without going anywhere.

This book covers that and the rest: how a sunken volcano becomes a ring of coral, what the monsoons do to the water, who the manta passing three meters from you is and why she has a name and a file, what happened to the reef in 1998, in 2016 and in 2024, and exactly what changed in the Maldives shark sanctuary in 2025.

Every photograph in here is from Gabriel's archive, taken in these same atolls, in November. There are no stock images. What is printed is what is there.

Have a good trip, and good dives.

The Dive For Fun team

Contents

ONE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND NINETY-TWO ISLANDS

1 Where you will be 12

2 How an atoll is born 15

3 The vocabulary of the reef 18

4 A nation a meter and a half above the sea 20

COWRIES, SULTANS AND RESORTS

5 The currency that was a mollusk 24

6 1153 and the next five hundred years 26

THE ENGINE: MONSOON AND TIDE

7 The two monsoons 30

8 The kandu: why the current is the attraction 32

9 November: what the sea will be like 34

WHO LIVES THERE

10 The big picture 37

11 The reef manta ray 38

12 Sharks 43

13 Rays, turtles and the reef 47

14 What you do not touch 51

DIVING THE CENTRAL ATOLLS

15 The boat and the routine 54

16 North Malé and South Malé 56

17 Felidhoo and Ari 60

18 Current technique 64
19 Equipment and safety 66

WHAT IS AT STAKE

20 The reef that has died three times 70
21 The shark sanctuary and the 2025 loophole 73
22 Mantas, research and what you can do 75

THE PRACTICAL SIDE

23 Documents, health, money and fees 78
24 Conduct in a Muslim country 82
25 Photographing the Maldives 84

PICTURE SECTION

26 Picture section 88

APPENDICES

Appendix A · How the trip is organized 102
Appendix B · Species list 105
Appendix C · Glossary 107
Appendix D · Sources 110
Appendix E · Image credits 112



PART ONE

One thousand one hundred and ninety-two islands

An entire country built by microscopic animals on top of sunken volcanoes, with less than half a percent of dry land

CHAPTER ONE

Where you will be

> *The most scattered country in the world, and one of the smallest. You will see four atolls out of twenty-six.*

The Maldives are **1,192 coral islands** arranged in a double chain of **26 natural atolls** in the Indian Ocean, about 750 kilometers from the Asian mainland, southwest of India and Sri Lanka.

The chain stretches **871 kilometers from north to south** and 130 from east to west, crossing the Equator, and covers roughly **90,000 km² of surface**. Of those 90 thousand, only **298 km² are dry land**. That is less than a third of one percent. Everything else is ocean and reef.

1,192	26	298 km²	1.5 m
ISLANDS	NATURAL ATOLLS	OF DRY LAND	AVERAGE ELEVATION

It is the smallest country in Asia and, by elevation, the lowest on the planet: the average height of the ground is about **1.5 meters** above sea level, and the highest natural point stands between 2.4 and 5.1 meters, depending on the source. No island in the country is more than eight kilometers long, and most measure between one and two square kilometers.

The exclusive economic zone, on the other hand, covers **923 thousand km²**. A country the size of a city governs a stretch of ocean larger than the Brazilian state of Pará.

The four atolls on this route

The BlueForce 3's central route covers four atolls, all within a few hours' sailing of Malé:

- **North Malé (Kaafu).** The atoll of the airport and the capital. It has the most visited sites in the country and some very consistent manta cleaning stations.
- **South Malé (Kaafu).** Just below, separated by a deep channel. Exposed channels and *thilas* with strong current and reef sharks.
- **Felidhoo (Vaavu).** The least populated of the four and the wildest. Long channels with plenty of big life, and the night dive with nurse sharks at Alimatha.
- **Ari (Alifu).** The largest and the richest of the four. Classic *thilas*, manta stations and, in the south, the area where whale sharks turn up regularly.



Reefs and islands from Natural Earth data (public domain). Not a nautical chart.

The four atolls of the central route. North Malé and South Malé at the top, Felidhoo to the south, Ari to the west. The gold line is the usual direction of the week, which changes with the monsoon. Map: Dive For Fun, over reefs and islands from Natural Earth.

CHAPTER TWO

How an atoll is born

> *Charles Darwin worked this out in 1842, before anyone could drill into an atoll to check. It took a century to prove him right.*

The question sounds simple and is not: why does a coral reef take the shape of a ring, with a shallow lagoon in the middle and deep ocean all around? Coral needs light, and therefore shallow water. If it only grows in the shallows, what is it doing on top of thousands of meters of ocean?

Darwin's answer

In *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs*, from **1842**, Darwin proposed the **subsidence model**, and the logic is elegant:

1. A volcano rises from the ocean floor and forms an island.
2. Coral grows along the fringe of that island, forming a **fringing reef** hugging the shore.
3. The volcanic island, heavy, begins to sink slowly, as the crust beneath it cools and gives way. But the coral keeps growing **upward**, at the speed the island goes down, because it needs the light. Between the coral and the shrinking island, a lagoon opens up: it has become a **barrier reef**.
4. The volcanic island sinks for good and disappears beneath the water. The ring of coral is still there, growing. What remains is an **atoll**: a living ring on top of a dead mountain.

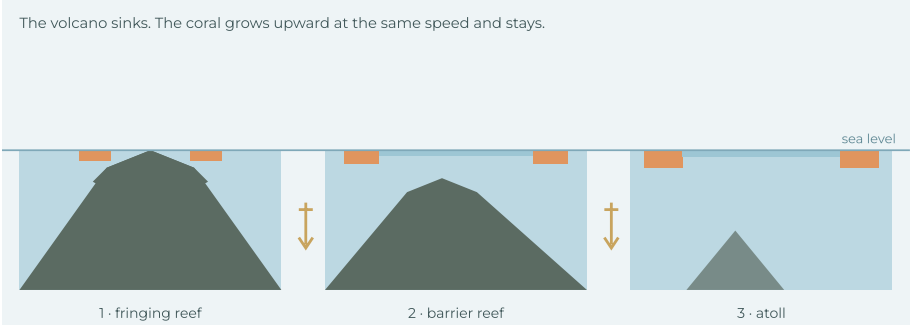


Diagram of the subsidence model proposed by Charles Darwin in 1842.

Darwin's three stages. The coral (orange) keeps pace with the sinking volcano, and what is left at the surface is a ring around a lagoon. Illustration: Dive For Fun.

The confirmation

Darwin had no way to drill into an atoll. The hypothesis stayed under debate for about a hundred years, until deep boreholes in Pacific atolls found, beneath hundreds of meters of coral limestone, exactly what he had predicted: **volcanic rock**.

In the case of the Maldives, the base is the **Chagos-Laccadive Ridge**, an underwater structure some 2,500 kilometers long that rises abruptly from the floor of the Indian Ocean and runs from north to south. The entire archipelago is the living crown of that ridge.

WHAT THIS MEANS WHEN YOU ENTER THE WATER

You are diving on the **outer edge of a mountain**. That is why the wall of any Maldivian atoll drops straight down and vanishes into the blue: outside the ring there is no shelf, there is the flank of a submerged ridge. And that is why the inner lagoon is shallow, sandy and calm, while thirty meters past the edge the bottom is already beyond a thousand meters.

A note on vocabulary

The word **atoll** comes from neither Greek nor Latin. It comes from Dhivehi, the language of the Maldives: *atholhu*. It is one of the rare words that an island language of the Indian Ocean has exported into the scientific vocabulary of the entire world. When a Japanese geologist talks about an atoll in the Pacific, he is using a Maldivian word.

CHAPTER THREE

The vocabulary of the reef

> *Five words in Dhivehi cover every briefing of the week. Worth memorizing before you board.*

The names of Maldivian dive sites are almost all made up of a local word plus a suffix that describes the *shape* of that piece of reef. Once you know the suffixes, you know half the briefing before it starts.

Atholhu · atoll

The whole ring: the coral barrier, the inner lagoon and the islands on top of the rim.

Kandu · channel

The passage that cuts through the rim of the atoll and connects the lagoon to the ocean. That is where the tide pushes the water through, and that is where the big diving is. **Every name ending in "kandu" is a current dive.**

Thila · submerged pinnacle

A coral mountain that rises from the floor of the lagoon or channel and stops *below* the surface, typically with its top between 5 and 15 meters down. It is the classic Maldivian formation: you circle the thila and the life concentrates on the side hit by the current.

Giri · shallow pinnacle

Same as a thila, but shallower, reaching almost to the surface. An easier dive, more light, great for macro and for the last dive of the day.

Faru · rim reef

The stretch of reef that forms the rim of the atoll itself, with the shallows on the inside and the drop-off on the outside.

> **READ THE NAME, GUESS THE DIVE**
>
> **Fotteyo Kandu**: channel, therefore current, therefore negative entry, reef hook and eyes on the blue.
> **Kandooma Thila**: submerged pinnacle, therefore a descent onto the top, a lap around it and life on the side hit by the current.
> **Maaya Thila**: same again, and it is where Ari's classic night dive happens.
> **Lankan Finolhu**: *finolhu* is a sandbank; the site sits in the shallows next to one, and it is a manta cleaning station.

The three positions of a channel dive

Worth understanding now, because you will hear this every day:

- **Incoming current (in-going).** The tide pushes water from the ocean into the lagoon. It brings clean, cool water and is the best condition for sharks in the channel. It is the current the guides prefer.
- **Outgoing current (out-going).** The lagoon empties into the ocean. Murkier, warmer water, loaded with plankton. Bad for visibility, great for mantas.
- **Slack tide.** The interval when the current stops before reversing. Good for photos and for anyone who is tired, and it is when the schools spread out.

None of the three is bad. Each one delivers something. The guide picks the site according to what the tide will be doing at that hour, and that is why the order of the dives changes every day.

CHAPTER FOUR

A nation a meter and a half above the sea

> *No other country has its physical existence so directly tied to the level of the ocean. This has been in the news for thirty years and it is still true.*

The average elevation of Maldivian ground is about **1.5 meters** above sea level. That is not the average for a region: it is the average for the country. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has already warned that, at current rates, sea level rise could make the Maldives uninhabitable by **2100**.

It is not an abstract end-of-century problem. It already shows up today as saltwater intrusion into the islands' groundwater, beach erosion and storm surges that flood entire islands. In 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami crossed the country meeting almost no relief to slow it down.

THE IMAGE THAT WENT AROUND THE WORLD

In October 2009, weeks before the climate conference in Copenhagen, then-president **Mohamed Nasheed** gathered his cabinet underwater, with tanks and regulators, in a lagoon six meters deep, to sign a document calling for global emission cuts. It was deliberate staging, and it worked: it became the most reproduced image of the vulnerability of island nations.

The coral paradox

There is a nuance that rarely makes the news and that matters. A coral island is not a fixed rock: it is a living structure that rebuilds itself. Sediment produced by the reef itself, sand made of ground-up coral and shells, is thrown onto the island by the waves, and in healthy conditions the island *grows* or changes shape along with the sea.

In other words: the island can only rise together with the ocean **as long as the reef is alive and producing sediment**. That is where the two problems meet. Warming and bleaching kill the reef; a dead reef stops making sand; an island without new sand does not keep up with the rising sea.

Coral conservation in the Maldives, therefore, is not an environmental agenda. It is a policy of territorial defense.



Island and sandbank, central atolls. The sand that forms the floor of the country is coral and shell ground down by the sea and by the fish that scrape the reef. Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.



PART TWO

Cowries, sultans and resorts

Two and a half thousand years on a trade route, a currency that was a mollusk and a country that reinvented itself as a destination in fifty years

CHAPTER FIVE

The currency that was a mollusk

> *For centuries, much of Africa bought and sold with shells gathered in the lagoons of the Maldives.*

The Maldives have a documented history of more than **2,500 years**. The *Mahāvaṃsa*, a Sinhalese chronicle compiled around the fifth century AD from much older traditions, already records people from Sri Lanka emigrating to the islands.

Position explains everything: the archipelago sits right in the middle of the monsoon routes that linked the Persian Gulf, India, Southeast Asia and the coast of Africa. Whoever sailed the Indian Ocean passed close by, and whoever passed close by stopped.

Cowrie

The product that put the Maldives on the map was neither spice nor gemstone: it was the **money cowrie** (*Monetaria moneta*), a small mollusk gathered in shallow lagoons.

The shell is durable, hard to counterfeit, easy to count and transport, and the Maldivian lagoons produced it in absurd quantities. That made the cowrie an **international currency**, used from India to China and, above all, in West Africa, for centuries.

The other export was **coir**, the fiber from the dried husk of the coconut, resistant to salt water, used to stitch and rig the *dhows* that crossed the Indian Ocean. Maldivian fiber was exported to Sind, China, Yemen and the Persian Gulf.

A COUNTRY THAT EXPORTED MONEY

Consider the strangeness of the arrangement: an archipelago with no metal, no building stone and no farmland exported, literally, currency. For a long time the Maldives were the mint of the Indian Ocean, and the raw material was gathered at low tide.

CHAPTER SIX

1153 and the next five hundred years

> *The country was Buddhist for longer than it has been Muslim. Almost nobody knows that, and the ruins are still there.*

Before Islam, the Maldives were **Buddhist** for about a millennium and a half, and before that probably Hindu. Remains of stupas, Buddha heads carved in coral stone and temple structures turn up on islands throughout the archipelago.

In **1153**, according to tradition, the last Buddhist king, **Dhovemi**, converted to Islam, took the title of Sultan Muhammad al-Adil and opened a sequence of six Islamic dynasties that spanned nearly eight hundred years, until the sultanate became elective in 1932. Some sources date the conversion to 1193.

The most likely explanation is commercial: in the twelfth century the Arabs dominated trade in the Indian Ocean, and an archipelago that lived off a sea route followed the religion of those who moved the goods.

Ibn Battuta

In **1343**, the Moroccan traveler **Ibn Battuta** reached the islands and ended up staying almost two years, even serving as a judge. His account is the best medieval description of the Maldives: it speaks of the cowrie, the co-

conut, the dried fish and the organization of the islands. Muslim travelers called the place *Mahal Dibiyat*, from the Arabic *mahal*, palace.

Europeans

1558 The **Portuguese** establish a presence in the Maldives, by order of the viceroy of Portuguese India. The occupation lasts about fifteen years and ends in revolt.

1887 The Maldives become a **British protectorate**, keeping the sultanate and internal administration.

1965 On 26 July, **independence** from the United Kingdom.

1968 On 11 November, the sultanate is abolished and the **Second Republic** is proclaimed.

1972 The country's first resort opens. Within a few decades, tourism becomes the engine of the economy.

2004 On 26 December, the **Indian Ocean tsunami** crosses the entire archipelago. More than eighty dead and a third of the population affected, in a country with no relief to slow the wave.

2008 New constitution and first multiparty presidential election.

2010 In March, a **total ban on shark fishing** across the entire exclusive economic zone. The Maldives become a sanctuary.

AN UNUSUAL TOURISM MODEL

The Maldives resolved a difficult tension with a geographic rule: for decades, **one island, one resort**, and resorts on uninhabited islands, separate from the local islands. That allowed international tourism with alcohol and bikinis without changing the life of the Muslim communities. In recent years the rules have loosened and guesthouses have appeared on local islands, but the logic of separation still organizes the country. For you, traveling by liveaboard, it hardly matters: the boat is the island.



PART THREE

The engine: monsoon and tide

Twice a day the tide pushes an entire ocean through the channels of the atolls. Everything you are going to see is positioned around that

CHAPTER SEVEN

The two monsoons

> *In the Maldives there are no four seasons. There are two, they switch direction, and the switch decides which side of the atoll you dive.*

The climate of the Maldives is a **tropical monsoon** climate, governed by the continental mass of Asia to the north. The year is divided into two wind regimes, and both have names in Dhivehi.

	Iruvai	Hulhangu
Direction	Northeast	Southwest
Period	December to April	May to November
Character	Dry, light wind	Humid, wind and rain
Clear water	East side of the atolls	West side of the atolls
Plankton	West side	East side

Why this changes the diving

Here is the key, and it is the most useful thing in this chapter. The monsoon pushes water from one side of the atoll to the other. The side where the water **comes in** receives clean oceanic water. The side where the water **goes out** receives the water of the lagoon, warmer and loaded with plankton.

This splits the country into two different dives at the same time:

- **On the clear-water side**, high visibility, deep blue and sharks in the channels, because predators follow clear water and strong current.
- **On the plankton side**, lower visibility, greenish water and **mantas**, because mantas eat plankton and go where it is.

During the southwest monsoon, which is yours, the plankton concentrates on the **east side** of the atolls, and that is where the most consistent manta cleaning stations and feeding areas are. The west side delivers the clear water.

WHY THE ITINERARY CHANGES EVERY DAY

An experienced Maldivian guide does not pick the site from the map: he picks it from the combination of monsoon, tide phase and time of day. The same channel that is spectacular at seven in the morning can be an empty dive at eleven. When the order of the dives changes at the last minute, that is what is happening, and it is a good sign.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The kandu

> *An atoll is a basin with doors. Twice a day the tide fills and empties the basin, and all that water passes through the doors.*

Picture the atoll as an enormous, shallow pool, tens of kilometers across, surrounded by a wall of coral. That wall has openings: the **kandus**. When the tide rises in the ocean, the water comes in through the kandus and fills the lagoon. When it falls, it goes out the same way.

The volume is immense and the passage is narrow. The result is something anyone who has ever pinched the end of a garden hose understands: the water speeds up.

The whole chain in four steps

1. The current drags **plankton** along and concentrates it at the mouth of the channel and on the edges where the water hits.
2. Small plankton-eating fish, **anthias**, fusiliers, glassfish, position themselves facing the current and feed without moving from the spot.
3. Mid-sized predators, jacks, mackerel, tuna, patrol the edge of those schools.
4. At the top, **reef sharks** hold still in the flow, with minimum effort, waiting. And, on the plankton side, the **mantas** filter the water with their mouths open.

All of this is tied to the same clock, which is the tide's. That is why a dive in the right kandu, at the right time, is one of the densest concentrations of life there is, and the same place two hours later can be deserted.

THE RIGHT POSITION IN THE CHANNEL

With an incoming current, the group enters at the **outer corner** of the channel, the shoulder where the ocean meets the edge, and that is where the sharks are. Then it lets go and drifts into the lagoon, ascending slowly. That is the standard shape of almost every channel dive in the Maldives, and it is why the briefing always talks about "getting into the corner".

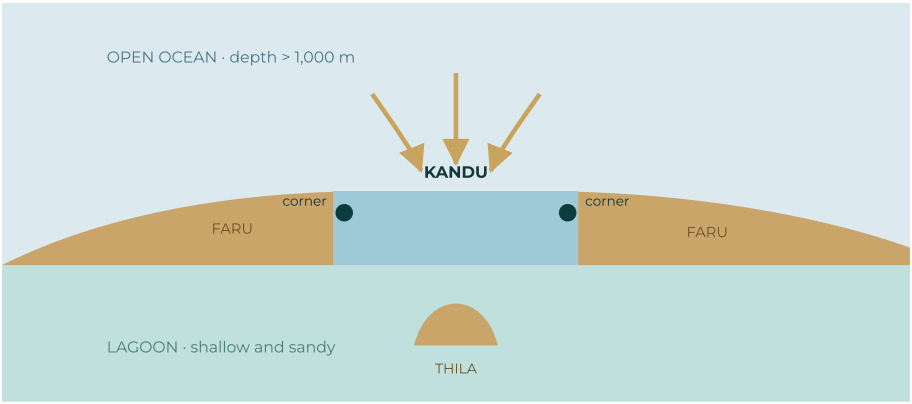


Diagram of an atoll channel with an incoming current. Not to scale.

Cross-section of a kandu with the current coming in. The sharks sit on the outer corners, where the water hits first; the thila sits behind, inside the flow. Illustration: Dive For Fun.

CHAPTER NINE

November: what the sea will be like

> *You have caught the end of the southwest monsoon, when the water starts to clear and the mantas have not yet left.*

November is a month of transition. The **Hulhangu**, the southwest monsoon, is ending, and the **Iruvai**, from the northeast, has not yet settled in. In practice, this means wind easing, rain easing and visibility improving over the course of the month, with the productivity of the wet monsoon still in the water.

28–29 °C	~30 °C	15–30 m
WATER	AIR	VISIBILITY

What to expect

- **Water between 28 and 29 °C**, warm and stable all year round. There is no marked thermocline. A **3 mm wetsuit** does the job for almost everyone; people doing three or four dives a day for a week tend to be grateful for a thin 5 mm or a vest.
- **Variable visibility**, and that variation is the important piece of information. On the clear-water side you can have 30 meters; on the plankton side, 15. It is not the day's problem: it is the choice of site.

- **Rain** still possible, in short showers. It does not get in the way of the diving and it cools the deck.
- **Sea** generally calm inside the atolls. The crossings between atolls can be bumpy, and several happen at night, with the boat under way while you sleep.
- **Sun** equatorial and vertical. It is the strongest sun most of you have ever been under. Reef-safe sunscreen, a rash guard and shade on deck.

> **ON THE MANTA EXPECTATION**
>
> November is a good manta month in the central atolls, but a manta is an animal, not an attraction. It shows up where there is plankton, and plankton depends on wind, tide and luck. Go expecting to *encounter*, not to *guarantee*. People who arrive with the photo already made up in their heads tend to come out frustrated from a week that was great.

The week on board

The central route runs on a fixed weekly cycle, from **Saturday to Saturday**, with embarkation and disembarkation at Malé airport. That is **seven nights on board** and up to **18 dives** in the week. Appendix A explains how this cycle is organized.



PART FOUR

Who lives there

Eleven hundred species of fish, one hundred and eighty-seven of coral, and a population of mantas that science knows individual by individual

CHAPTER TEN

The big picture

The archipelago's numbers, to calibrate what to expect.

The reefs of the Maldives are built by **187 species of coral**. In this part of the Indian Ocean, **1,100 species of fish**, **5 species of sea turtle**, **21 species of whale and dolphin**, **400 species of mollusk** and **83 of echinoderms** have been recorded, as well as more than 145 species of crab and 48 of shrimp.

1,100	187	21	5
FISH	CORALS	CETACEANS	TURTLES

It is not endemism that impresses here, as it does in the Red Sea or at Cocos. It is the **abundance**. The Maldives sit in the middle of a fertile ocean, cut through by currents, with an absurd amount of reef habitat: more than a thousand islands, each surrounded by its own ring, with lagoon, channel, wall and pinnacle.

The result is density. You are not going to see species that exist nowhere else. You are going to see far more animals per cubic meter than you are used to.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The reef manta ray

> *The animal of this trip. Each individual has a unique birthmark on its belly, and in the Maldives they have a file, a name and a history.*

Reef manta ray VU

Mobula alfredi

Typical wingspan of 3 to 4 meters, and it can exceed 5. It is the resident reef species, smaller and more coastal than the giant oceanic manta ray (*Mobula birostris*), which also occurs in the Maldives but is far rarer on the central route.

A filtering machine

A manta is an elasmobranch, a relative of sharks and rays, and it has no stinger. It feeds by filtering zooplankton with its gill plates, and the two rolled-up "flaps" at the front of the head, the **cephalic lobes**, work as a funnel: when it is about to feed, it unrolls them both and channels the water into its open mouth.

When the plankton density gets very high, the behaviors that made the place famous appear: mantas **somersaulting** on the same spot, looping over themselves so as not to leave the patch of food, and sometimes lining up in a **feeding chain**, one behind the other, each taking advantage of the water the one in front has stirred up.

The cleaning station

The other behavior, and the most reliable one for the diver, is cleaning. At fixed points on the reef, almost always the top of a *thila* or a coral head swept by the current, live cleaner wrasses and butterflyfish. The manta arrives, slows down, almost stops in place, and stays **hovering** while the cleaners pick parasites from its skin, its gills and its mouth.

It comes back to the same stations year after year. That is what makes the encounter predictable enough to go into an itinerary.

HOW NOT TO SCARE THE MANTA AWAY

This is the most important briefing of the week, and the most disrespected one in the world.

Stay low, never above. A manta reads shadow and movement coming from above as a threat. Kneel or hover on the bottom, **to the side** of the station, and let it come.

Do not chase. Swimming after a manta is the fastest way to end the dive without a manta. It is much faster than you.

Do not block its path. If it is descending to the station and you are in the way, it turns aside and leaves.

Do not touch, ever. The skin is covered by a layer of mucus that protects against infection. One touch removes that layer.

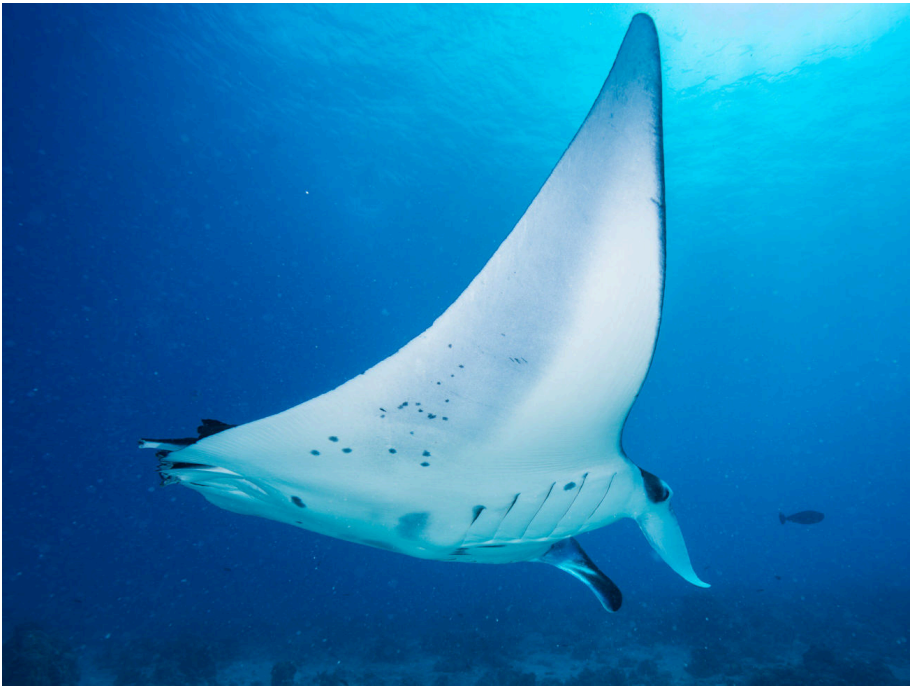
Breathe slowly. A curtain of bubbles under a manta being cleaned drives the animal off.

Each one has a name

The pattern of dark spots on a manta's belly is **unique and permanent**, like a fingerprint. That made it possible to build photo-identification catalogs, and the Maldives have one of the largest and oldest in the world, maintained by the **Manta Trust** and by the Maldivian manta conservation program.

Thousands of individuals are cataloged, with sighting histories that stretch back many years and reveal routes, site fidelity and even relationships between animals.

> **YOUR PHOTO COUNTS AS SCIENTIFIC DATA**
>
> If you manage a photo **of the whole belly, head-on and straight**, with date and location, it can be submitted to the catalog. If it is a new individual, you take part in its registration; if it is a known one, you add a point to that animal's history. Ask the crew where to send it. It is the most useful thing a diver with a camera can do in the Maldives.



Reef manta ray (*Mobula alfredi*) in the central atolls. The spot pattern on the belly is unique to each individual and allows it to be identified by photo. Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.



Manta feeding at night, mouth open and cephalic lobes unrolled. The boat's lights attract plankton, and the plankton attracts the manta: a behavior that only happens after dark. Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sharks

> *The Maldives banned shark fishing in 2010 and became a world reference. The result can be seen in any channel.*

Gray reef shark EN

Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos

The shark of the channels. Robust body, tail edged in black, and the habit of holding still facing the current, spending the minimum of energy. It is the animal you will look for every time you descend into a kandu with the tide coming in.

If one of them arches its back, drops its pectorals and swims in a zigzag, that is a **threat display**, and it means you have come too close. Back off slowly, facing it, and that is the end of it.

Whitetip reef shark VU

Triaenodon obesus

Slender, with white tips on the dorsal fin and tail. It spends the day lying under coral ledges and hunts at night, slipping into crevices after sleeping fish. Harmless.

Tawny nurse shark VU

Nebrius ferrugineus

Heavy-set, small-mouthed, with barbels on the snout and a placid face. It sucks prey off the bottom instead of biting. It is the star of the night dive at **Alimatha**, in Felidhoo, where dozens of them gather in the shallows, by the jetty, in one of the most impressive and most controversial dives in the country.

Whale shark EN

Rhincodon typus

The largest fish in the world, a filter feeder and harmless. In the Maldives it occurs all year round, and the most consistent region is the **south of Ari Atoll**, where there is a marine protected area created specifically for it. Encounters are usually on snorkel, in the shallows, with the animal cruising in a straight line.

Rules: do not touch, do not block its path, do not fire flash in its face, and keep your distance. Swimming over its head makes it dive and disappear.

Blacktip reef shark VU

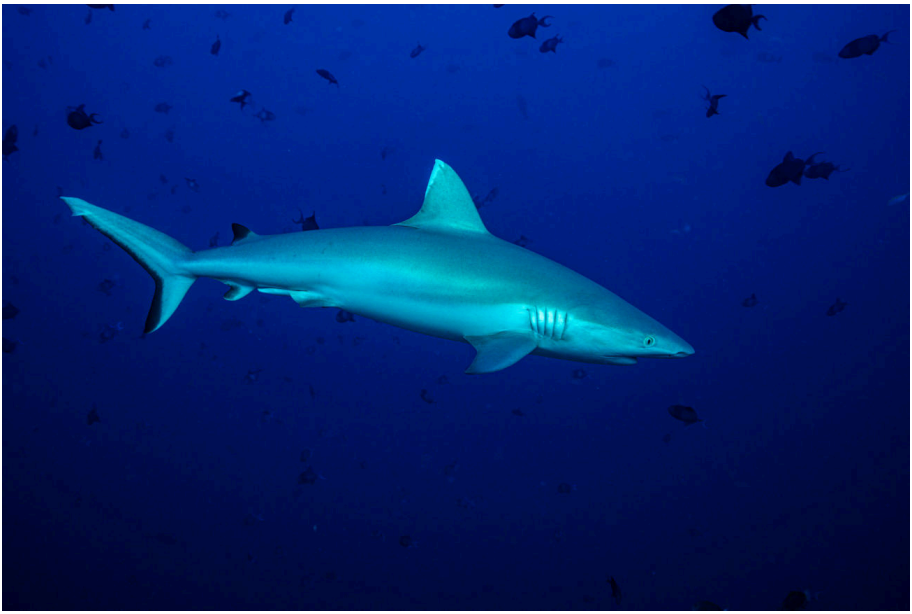
Carcharhinus melanopterus

The shark of the shallows. Sharply marked black tips on the dorsal fin and tail, and the habit of patrolling lagoons and island edges in half a meter of water. It is the one you will see from the boat's ladder, from the dhoni and from the sandbank, often before your mask gets wet. Shy around divers.

Scalloped hammerhead CR

Sphyrna lewini

The lottery of the channels. It appears in the blue, deep, at dawn, most regularly at Rasdhoo Atoll, next door to Ari, where there are dives made solely to look for it. In the channels of the central route it is an occasional encounter, almost always with the tide coming in and clear water. Critically Endangered worldwide, and one of the reasons the Maldivian sanctuary matters.



Gray reef shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) holding still in the current. Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.

AN HONEST NOTE ON ALIMATHA

The gathering of nurse sharks and stingrays at the Alimatha jetty formed, in good measure, through decades of fish scraps being discarded by the local resort. It is a spectacular dive and it is also a behavior induced by people. It is worth knowing that, going with respect and not treating it as untouched nature.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Rays, turtles and the reef

> *The supporting cast, which in any other destination would be the main cast.*

Spotted eagle ray

Aetobatus ocellatus

Duck-like snout, dark back covered in white spots and a very long tail. It usually passes in small groups, in formation, crossing the channel in the blue water. It is one of the most beautiful silhouettes in Maldivian diving.

Pink whipray VU

Pateobatis fai

The big, smooth stingray, with a pinkish-gray back and a tail as thin as a whip, that forms the carpets of Alimatha and appears lying on sandy bottoms in the lagoons. Its disc can exceed a meter and a half. It has a stinger, like every bottom-dwelling stingray: never walk or kneel on sand without looking first.

Hawksbill turtle CR

Eretmochelys imbricata

The most common on the reefs here. Hooked beak, shell with overlapping plates and a serrated edge. It eats sponge, and it is one of the few creatures in the sea capable of that.

Green turtle EN

Chelonia mydas

Larger, with a rounded beak, herbivorous as an adult. More associated with seagrass beds and shallow lagoons.

The schools

- **Bluestripe snapper** (*Lutjanus kasmira*), in dense yellow curtains against the coral. It is the most photogenic school in the country.
- **Bigeyes** or *bigeye* (*Priacanthus* and relatives), red, with enormous eyes, stacked under ledges.
- **Fusiliers** (Caesionidae), in blue and yellow clouds in the water column, always facing the current.
- **Barracudas**, in columns that turn slowly in the blue water.
- **Glassfish**, in shimmering balls inside overhangs and caves.

The regular characters

- **Napoleon wrasse** (*Cheilinus undulatus*, EN), the giant with thick lips and a hump on its forehead.
- **Maldives anemonefish** (*Amphiprion nigripes*), endemic to the region, orange with a single white bar and black pelvic fins.
- **Clown triggerfish** (*Balistoides conspicillum*), white with enormous spots on its belly, one of the most boldly patterned fish in the ocean.
- **Batfish** (*Platax* spp.), curious, which comes close and follows the diver.
- **Moray eels**, including the yellowmouth moray, very common on the thilas.

- **Emperor angelfish** (*Pomacanthus imperator*), the angelfish with blue and yellow stripes.
- **Spinner dolphins** (*Stenella longirostris*), in large groups in the channels in the late afternoon, leaping and spinning. Seen from the dhoni and from the deck almost every day; in the water, they rarely stay.

The corals

The structure you are going to see is the work of **hard coral**, which lays down a skeleton of calcium carbonate. In the Maldives the dominant genera are *Acropora*, in tables and branches that grow fast and are the first to die in a bleaching event, and *Porites*, in massive domes that grow slowly and hold out longer. That is why, after 1998, 2016 and 2024, many shallows swapped tables for domes.

In the channels and thilas swept by the current you find **soft coral**, with no rigid skeleton, which swells with water when the current runs: it is the pink and the orange of the walls at HP Reef and Fotteyo. It depends less on light and so it carpets cave ceilings and overhangs. And there are the **gorgonians**, fans planted broadside to the current to filter what passes.



School of bluestripe snappers (*Lutjanus kasmira*) over the reef, with a manta in the background. Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

What you do not touch

> *The Maldives are a safe destination. Every problem with wildlife here starts with a hand in the wrong place.*

Fire coral

Millepora spp.

It is not a true coral, it is a relative of the jellyfish. Mustard yellow with whitish tips. It burns instantly and the mark lasts for days. The champion of accidents, because people lean on it to steady a photo.

Lionfish LC

Pterois spp.

Beautiful, slow and bristling with venomous spines. It does not attack, but it does not get out of the way either. The risk is backing up without looking behind you.

Stonefish and scorpionfish

Synanceia spp. · Scorpaenopsis spp.

Invisible, motionless, on the bottom. Never rest a hand or a knee, not even on harmless-looking rubble.

Titan triggerfish

Balistoides viridescens

The only one that comes after you. In the breeding season it defends a cone-shaped territory that **opens upward**: swimming toward the surface is going deeper into it. Move away **horizontally**, close to the bottom, with your fin between you and it.

AND THE CORAL, WHICH IS THE MOST FREQUENT VICTIM

The real threat in the Maldives is not what hurts the diver: it is the diver who hurts the reef. A fin on coral, a reef hook caught in living coral, a knee resting on an Acropora. A colony that took thirty years to grow breaks in a second, and in a country that depends on the reef even to go on existing, that is more serious than it looks.



PART FIVE

Diving the central atolls

Eighteen dives in four atolls, every one of them decided by the tide. Kandu, thila, giri and the night dive with nurse sharks

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The boat and the routine

> *Seven nights, eighteen dives and a two-boat system that is the Maldivian standard and surprises anyone who has never seen it.*

The central route leaves Malé on a fixed weekly cycle, boarding on **Saturday** and disembarking the following Saturday, in the morning, at the airport. That is **7 nights** aboard the **BlueForce 3**, full board, and **up to 18 dives** in the week, night dives included.

The dhoni

This is the Maldivian peculiarity. The liveaboard is almost never the boat you dive from. It travels accompanied by a **dhoni**, a traditional wooden support boat of the country, which carries the tanks, the compressor and the dive deck.

In practice: you gear up on the dhoni, dive from the dhoni, climb back onto the dhoni, and return to the liveaboard to eat and sleep. This keeps the main boat clean and quiet, and lets the dhoni drop you at one point and pick you up at another, which is exactly what a drift dive needs.

The rhythm of the week

Saturday Welcome at Malé airport, transfer to the boat, cabin check-in, safety briefing and dinner on board.

Sun to Fri	The diving days. Three dives a day, plus night dives, working through North Malé, South Malé, Felidhoo and Ari. Snorkeling, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding for those who do not dive, and the possibility of a barbecue on a deserted island and a walk around Malé, weather permitting.
Friday	Last dives in the morning, respecting the interval before the flight, and return to the vicinity of Malé.
Saturday	Morning disembarkation at Malé airport.

A typical day

Light breakfast before sunrise, briefing, first dive early, on the right tide. Proper breakfast afterward. Second dive mid-morning, lunch, rest, third in the afternoon, dinner, and the night dive when there is one.

Dive times are not fixed, and that is the most important difference from other destinations: **here the tide is in charge**. If the best moment at Fotteyo is 6:40, the briefing is at 6:10. If the current is going to turn at 3 pm, the third dive moves back. Accept the guide's schedule without arguing: he is reading the tide table, not improvising.

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENT

The central route requires **Advanced Open Water or equivalent** and recommends around **50 logged dives**. It is not about depth: it is about current and drift. If you are below that, or have not dived in a while, talk to us beforehand and we will sort it out with a refresher.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

North Malé and South Malé

> *The two atolls of the capital. The most visited in the country, and still among the best.*

The names below are the ones that come up most often on this route. The actual choice each day belongs to the guide, depending on monsoon, tide and how many boats are in the area.

North Malé (Kaafu)

Lankan · Manta Point

CLEANING STATION · 8 TO 15 M · EASY · MODERATE CURRENT

A sequence of coral heads on a shallow bottom beside a sandbank, each one working as a **manta cleaning station**. During the southwest monsoon, which is yours, it is one of the most consistent sites in the country.

The procedure is always the same: the group settles **on the bottom, to the side** of the station, everyone low, and waits. Whoever rises up to "get a better look" ruins the dive for twelve people. Because it is shallow, bottom time is long and the light is good.

Banana Reef

BANANA-SHAPED REEF · 5 TO 30 M · THE HISTORIC CLASSIC

One of the first dive sites ever catalogued in the Maldives, and still excellent. It has everything in a single dive: overhangs, caves, a shallow coral garden, walls and dense schools of snappers and bigeyes. A good check dive on the first day.

HP Reef · Rainbow Reef

THILA IN A CHANNEL · 10 TO 30 M · STRONG CURRENT · PROTECTED AREA

A pinnacle inside a channel, with walls covered in **soft coral** in pink, orange and purple, which is where the nickname comes from. It has a famous vertical crack and overhangs full of glassfish. The current is usually strong, and it is precisely the current that keeps the soft coral inflated and colorful.

Nassimo Thila

THILA · 10 TO 30 M · MODERATE TO STRONG CURRENT

Also called Paradise Rock. An elongated pinnacle with large gorgonians on the face hit by the current, schools in the water column and reef sharks circling at the edge.

South Malé (Kaafu)

Kandooma Thila

HEART-SHAPED THILA · 14 TO 30 M+ · STRONG CURRENT · MANY PEOPLE'S FAVORITE

A large pinnacle at the mouth of a channel, with a shape that looks like a heart from above. You descend at the point hit by the current and find, almost always, **grey reef sharks** hovering in the flow, trevallies hunting and huge schools of fusiliers. It is a true current dive, and it is where the reef hook makes the most difference.

Guraidhoo Kandu

CHANNEL · 10 TO 30 M+ · STRONG CURRENT · SHARKS

A wide channel with two well-defined corners. On an incoming tide, the right corner delivers grey reef sharks, whitetips, eagle rays and, occasionally, a hammerhead passing in the blue. It ends in a drift into the lagoon.

Cocoa Corner and Embudhoo Express

CHANNELS · LONG DRIFT · STRONG CURRENT

Two classic drift channels of the southern atoll. Embudhoo is a long, sheltered channel that you ride from end to end on the incoming current, with overhangs full of resting sharks. The name “express” is not decorative.



Grey reef sharks at the mouth of a channel, on an incoming tide. This is the scene a kandu dive is looking for. Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Felidhoo and Ari

> *The wildest atoll on the route and the richest. One has the channels, the other has the thilas and the whale shark.*

Felidhoo (Vaavu)

Vaavu is the least populated of the four atolls, with very few inhabited islands, and its eastern edge is torn by long, deep channels. It is the big-diving atoll of the route.

Fotteyo Kandu

CHANNEL · 10 TO 40 M · STRONG CURRENT · FREQUENTLY CITED AMONG THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY

A channel with an outer wall riddled with caves, arches and crevices, all covered in soft coral. It appears regularly on lists of the best dives in the Maldives, and the reason is the sum of its parts: complex topography, good current and plenty of big animals.

On an incoming tide, the corner of the channel gathers **grey reef sharks**, tuna, trevallies and schools. In the holes of the wall, glassfish and soft coral in full color. One of the dives of the trip.

Miyaru Kandu

CHANNEL · 15 TO 30 M+ · STRONG CURRENT · *MIYARU* MEANS SHARK

The name gives away the content. A current-swept channel, with a plateau at about 25 meters from which you watch the parade: grey reef sharks, whitetips, eagle rays and, with luck, a hammerhead in the blue. A dive for looking outward, not at the reef.

Alimatha · the night dive

SHALLOW, BESIDE THE JETTY · 8 TO 15 M · NO CURRENT · HIGH DENSITY OF ANIMALS

The most famous night dive in the Maldives. On a shallow sandy bottom, beside the island's jetty, dozens of **nurse sharks**, large stingrays and trevallies gather in a whirl of bodies that passes close to and over the divers.

It is intense and it is safe, as long as you follow the briefing: stay on the bottom, sitting or kneeling in the sand, hands close to your body, no chasing and no putting your hand in front of the animal. The note of honesty applies again: this aggregation has its origin in decades of fish scraps being discarded by the resort. It is spectacular, and it is not pristine.

Ari (Alifu)

The largest and most diverse of the four. Ari has the most classic *thilas* in the country, manta cleaning stations that switch sides with the monsoon and, at the far south, an area where whale sharks occur regularly.

Maaya Thila

THILA · TOP AT 6 M, BASE BEYOND 30 · PROTECTED AREA · THE CLASSIC NIGHT DIVE OF ARI

A circular pinnacle small enough to be circled several times in one dive. By day it has reef sharks, turtles, moray eels and schools. **By night it is another place**: the whitetips hunt in packs, entering crevices, crossing the beam of your flashlight and passing between the legs of whoever is on the bottom. It is one of the most famous night dives in the world.

Fish Head · Mushimasmingili Thila

THILA · 10 TO 40 M · PROTECTED AREA · STRONG CURRENT

One of the best-known sites in the Maldives, protected since the 1990s. Walls with overhangs, gorgonians, dense schools of snappers and fusiliers, resident Napoleon wrasse and grey reef sharks on the current-swept face.

Broken Rock and Kudarah Thila

THILAS · 12 TO 30 M · TOPOGRAPHY · MODERATE TO STRONG CURRENT

Broken Rock is a pinnacle split down the middle by a narrow canyon that you swim through, with walls covered in soft coral. Kudarah is a small thila with four coral heads on top and one of the most beautiful soft coral gardens in the atoll. Both are dives for scenery, not just for animals.

South Ari · whale shark

MARINE PROTECTED AREA · SNORKELING IN THE SHALLOWS · NOT A TANK DIVE

The southern strip of Ari Atoll is the most consistent **whale shark** area in the Maldives, and it is a marine protected area created for that purpose. The encounter is usually by snorkel, with the boat locating the animal at the surface and the group entering the water ahead of it.

The rules are taken seriously: minimum distance, no touching, no flash, no blocking its path and no swimming over its head. And, once again, it is a wild animal: it is not in the contract.



Tawny nurse shark (*Nebrius ferrugineus*) in the shallows. The small mouth sucks prey from the bottom instead of biting. Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Current technique

> *In the Maldives the current is not a problem to be solved. It is the tool you will use all week long.*

Negative entry

You enter from the dhoni with your BCD **completely empty**, so you sink immediately and are not carried off at the surface, where the current is strongest. Regulator in your mouth, mask on your face, one hand holding both, and the decision to descend already made before you roll.

The classic mistake is to enter with "just a little" air in the BCD and spend thirty seconds floating. In those thirty seconds you are already fifty meters from the site.

The reef hook

The **reef hook** is a short line with a carabiner at one end and a hook at the other. You set the hook on **dead rock or coral that is already broken**, never on living coral, clip the line to your BCD and add a little air. You hang in the current like a kite, effortlessly, with both hands free.

It is the piece of equipment that turns an exhausting channel dive into a comfortable thirty minutes of shark watching. In the Maldives it is not an accessory: bring your own.

To release, empty the BCD first, then unhook. If you release the hook while still inflated, you go up like a cork.

The drift and the buoy

Most dives end in a drift, inside the lagoon, far from where you entered. A surface marker buoy of at least 1.5 meters, with a reel, is **mandatory**, and you need to know how to deploy it at five meters, with no reference, without tangling yourself in the line and without going up with it.

The dhoni looks for buoys. A head in the water, in a sea with waves, is practically invisible.

If the current turns out stronger than expected

- **Do not fight it head-on.** You lose and use up all your air.
- **Go down and use the terrain.** Near the bottom and behind structures the current is much weaker.
- **If you are being carried into the blue**, do not try to get back. Ascend under control, do your stop and deploy the buoy.
- **Down-currents**, which push you downward on the outer wall, do happen. If you feel one, move away from the wall toward the blue, inflate and swim horizontally, never vertically.

THE SKILL THAT IS WORTH THE WHOLE WEEK

If you are going to practice one thing before boarding, practice **motionless buoyancy and buoy deployment in blue water**. It is not depth, it is not cold and it is not distance. It is knowing how to stay still in a current and knowing how to be found at the end.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Equipment and safety

> *Warm water and good visibility give the impression of easy diving. The list stays the same.*

What to bring

- **3 mm wetsuit** for most people; a thin 5 mm or a vest for those who feel the cold or do three to four dives a day.
- **Reef hook** with a line of about 1.5 m and a carabiner. An item of daily use here.
- **Surface marker buoy** of 1.5 m or more, with a **reel**. Not the little folded one in your pocket.
- **Whistle** on the BCD and, if possible, a signaling mirror.
- **Dive computer** with nitrox and a fresh battery, or a backup computer.
- **Two flashlights** for the night dives: primary and backup.
- **Spare mask**, O-rings, fin straps, tape.
- Reef-safe sunscreen, without oxybenzone or octinoxate, and a lycra rash guard.

NITROX

On the central route nitrox is usually **optional and paid separately**, as a package for the whole week. With up to 18 dives in six days, between 20 and 30 meters, the difference in margin is large. It is worth it. If you are not yet certified, take the course before you travel.

Safety

The Maldives have **hyperbaric chambers** in operation in the country, including near Malé and in Ari Atoll. That is a real advantage over remote destinations, and even so the procedures do not change.

- Dive within no-decompression limits.
- Safety stop of 3 minutes at 5 meters, always. On a drift, it is done free in blue water, with the buoy deployed.
- Ascend at less than 9 meters per minute in the final stretch.
- Hydrate a lot. Equatorial heat, sun and three dives a day dehydrate you more than it seems.
- Dive insurance with chamber and evacuation coverage is **mandatory**. Bring the emergency number printed out.

THE INTERVAL BEFORE FLYING

The last day on board has diving in the morning only, and nothing after that. It is not leftover scheduling: it is the desaturation interval before the flight. The usual recommendation after several days of repetitive diving is **at least 18 hours** without diving before boarding a plane. Add to that the fact that many people will connect straight onto a long flight back to Brazil, and the math becomes even more important. No "quick one" on the last day.



PART SIX

What is at stake

A country that needs a living reef in order to keep existing physically, and that has already watched that reef die three times in twenty-six years

CHAPTER TWENTY

The reef that has died three times

> *1998, 2016 and 2024. Three mass bleaching events in twenty-six years, each arriving before the reef had absorbed the one before.*

Shallow coral lives within a narrow thermal band. When the water stays about 1 °C **above the average summer maximum** for a few weeks, the coral expels the symbiotic algae that live inside it and give it its color and much of its food. The white skeleton shows through: that is **bleaching**. If the temperature drops back quickly, the coral recovers. If it does not, the coral dies.

1998

The El Niño of 1997 and 1998 caused the first global mass bleaching event ever recorded, and the Indian Ocean was among the hardest-hit regions. In the Maldives, shallow coral mortality was devastating, with estimates that most shallow-water colonies were lost in several atolls.

The Maldivian reef spent the following years rebuilding itself, slowly. Hard coral grows on the order of centimeters per year.

2016

In 2015 and 2016, another strong El Niño produced a new global event, and the Maldives were hit again, with widespread bleaching. The critical differ-

ence is the interval: eighteen years is not enough for a reef to rebuild completely. The second blow fell on a structure that was still recovering.

2024

The fourth global bleaching event, declared in April 2024, reached the Maldives in March of that year, when the country's Marine Research Institute issued the first alert. A survey published in 2026, covering 18 reefs in the central and southern atolls, measured the outcome: in the **central atolls, live hard coral cover fell by more than 40% on average**, and one lagoon reef in Ari lost 57%. The tables and branches of *Acropora* were the hardest hit, and what remains leans toward massive and encrusting corals, with less relief and less shelter for fish.

In extent, 2024 matched 2016. In intensity, it came close to 1998. And it arrived eight years after the previous one, not eighteen. The south of the country suffered less, which is why it is already being spoken of as a possible climate refuge.

WHY HERE IS DIFFERENT FROM EVERYWHERE ELSE

In any country, a dead reef is an ecological and economic loss. In the Maldives it is a **territorial** loss. The islands are made of sediment produced by the reef itself: ground-up coral sand and shell. A living reef manufactures sand and the island keeps pace with the rising sea. A dead reef stops manufacturing, and the island begins losing ground to the ocean.

A country a meter and a half above sea level is not protecting coral out of love for nature. It is protecting the ground it stands on.

What you will see

It is worth going with calibrated expectations. The Maldivian reef today is a mosaic: there are areas of hard coral in good condition, there are areas in recovery and there are areas of rubble colonized by algae. On the more sheltered *thilas* and on the walls with current, the picture is very good. In the shallows, especially in the lagoons, you will see *Acropora* skeletons and you will see domes of *Porites* that survived. That is the face of the reef after 2024.

This does not spoil the trip. It is part of understanding the place.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The sanctuary and the 2025 loophole

> *For fifteen years, the Maldives were one of the largest shark sanctuaries in the world. In 2025 that changed in part, and it is worth knowing exactly what.*

After partial restrictions dating back to 1998, in **March 2010** the Maldives decreed a **total ban on shark fishing** throughout their exclusive economic zone, some 920,000 square kilometers of Indian Ocean, and also banned the import and export of fins.

The reasoning was as much economic as environmental: a live shark, seen by divers week after week, generates far more revenue over its lifetime than the same animal sold once. In a country that lives on dive tourism, the math is easy.

The result is in any channel on your route. The density of grey reef sharks in the Maldives is far higher than in almost all of the Indian Ocean, and it is the direct consequence of those fifteen years.

What changed

In **August 2025**, President Mohamed Muizzu announced the reopening of fishing for **gulper sharks** (genus *Centrophorus*), and it was regulated and opened from **November 2025**: up to forty licensed vessels, only in waters outside the atolls, with a season from December to June and a heavy fine

for anyone catching any other shark. It is a deep-water animal, fished for its liver oil, and it is not one of the species you will encounter while diving.

The reopening was challenged: a constitutional petition against the regulation was accepted by the High Court of the Maldives in July 2026, and the case is ongoing. In that same November of 2025, gulper sharks were added to Appendix II of CITES, which controls international trade in the listed species. By the time you read this, the situation may have changed again, in either direction.

The decision was criticized by dozens of conservation organizations and scientists, who pointed to two problems. The first is biological: deep-water sharks are among the slowest-reproducing marine animals in existence, and *Centrophorus* populations have already collapsed in other parts of the world because of precisely this fishery. The second is institutional: opening one exception weakens the logic of the sanctuary as a whole.

BEING FAIR TO BOTH SIDES

The reef sanctuary still stands, and the sharks you are going to see remain protected. This is not a total reversal, and it is honest to say so. But it is also honest to record that a country which presented itself as a complete sanctuary now has an exception, and that the scientific community considers that exception poorly chosen.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Mantas, research and what you can do

> *Few places have turned tourism into science so well. Your camera is part of that.*

Mantas are protected in the Maldives, and some of the sites where they gather have specific protection. The best-known case is **Hanifaru Bay**, in Baa Atoll, declared a Marine Protected Area on **8 June 2009**, with strict rules: a visitor limit, a maximum time inside the bay, and a ban on scuba diving and fishing. The whole of Baa is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Hanifaru is not on your route, which runs through the central atolls. But the rules that were born there have spread across the country, and that is why the manta briefings in North Malé and in Ari are so detailed.

Photography as data

The **Manta Trust** and the Maldivian manta conservation program maintain one of the largest manta photo-identification catalogs in the world, built largely from photos sent in by ordinary divers.

- **Manta:** photograph the **whole belly**, head-on and straight, with the spots visible. Note the date, atoll and site.
- **Whale shark:** photograph the **left flank**, behind the gill slits, where the identification pattern is.

- **Turtle:** photograph the profile of the head, on both sides. The facial scales are unique.
- Ask the crew where to send them. Maldivian boats usually have the contact on the tip of their tongue.

The rest, which is simple

- **Touch nothing.** Not manta, not turtle, not shark, not coral.
- **Buoyancy.** Most of the damage divers do to reefs is done by fins, not hands.
- **Hook onto dead rock.** Never onto live coral. Look before you clip in.
- **Reef-safe sunscreen**, with no oxybenzone or octinoxate. Better still: a rash guard.
- **No single-use plastic.** Bring a reusable bottle. A small island has nowhere to send its trash.
- **Do not buy** turtle shell, shark teeth, coral or shells. Besides being illegal, it feeds the collecting.
- **Respect the approach rules** even when nobody is watching. Especially when nobody is watching.

You bought a week in a country that is betting its physical existence on the health of the reef. It is worth diving accordingly.



PART SEVEN

The practical side

Documents, money, what is allowed and what is not in a Muslim country, and how to photograph all of it

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Documents, health, money and fees

> *Entering the Maldives is among the simplest in the world. What demands attention is the online form and the extras bill at the end of the week.*

Documents

- **Passport** with plenty of validity to spare. The practical recommendation, and what most airlines require, is **six months** from the date of entry.
- **Visa**: Brazilians receive a tourist visa **on arrival**, free of charge, typically for 30 days. There is nothing to arrange beforehand.
- **Online travel form**: the Maldives require an electronic traveler declaration, completed on the official immigration website within the **96 hours before** arrival, and another before departure. It is quick, it is free and it is mandatory. Leave it for the airport and you will face a queue with bad wi-fi.
- **Proof of accommodation**: the liveaboard booking will do. Have it as a PDF on your phone.
- **Diving credential and logbook**: checked at boarding. Download the digital credential beforehand, because the internet on board is poor.
- **Dive insurance** with chamber and evacuation coverage, mandatory.
- **International Certificate of Vaccination against yellow fever.** The Maldives require the certificate from anyone arriving from a country

with transmission risk, and Brazil is on that list. Without it, entry can end in quarantine. The vaccine only becomes valid ten days after the dose, so this is something to sort out well in advance, not on the eve of the trip. The certificate is issued by Anvisa (Brazil's health agency) and is valid for life.

Health

- **There is no malaria** in the Maldives, but there is **dengue**, with cases all year round. Repellent at dusk whenever you are on an inhabited island; on board, away from land, the problem almost disappears.
- **Tap water is not for drinking**, not even in Malé. The boat provides filtered or bottled water; bring your own bottle.
- **Seasickness:** the crossings between atolls are usually at night and can be rough. If you know you get seasick, take the medication before the boat sets off, not after.
- **Ears:** three dives a day for six days take more of a toll on your ears than depth does. Equalize early and without forcing, and stop at the first sign of pain.
- **Sun:** equatorial and overhead. Reef-safe sunscreen, a rash guard and shade on deck between dives.
- Regular medications in your carry-on, in the original packaging and in enough quantity for the whole week: there is no pharmacy in the middle of the atoll.

Time zone and plugs

- The Maldives are on **UTC+5**, eight hours ahead of Brasília. Many boats and resorts adopt "island time", one hour ahead of the official time, to gain morning light. Check which clock the boat uses before the first briefing.
- Outlets are **230 V**, types D and G (British). Bring an adapter.

Money

The local currency is the **rufiyaa** (MVR), but you will probably never touch it. Resorts, liveaboards and the airport operate in **US dollars**, and cards are accepted on board without any problem.

- Bring **cash dollars** for tips and for any purchases in Malé.
- The boat usually settles the extras bill on the last day: nitrox, drinks, equipment rental, laundry.
- **Crew tip**: collected at the end of the week and an important part of their income. The standard is around 10% of the price of the trip, but agree on the amount with the group at the start of the week rather than improvising on the last night.

The fees

Your package, as advertised, leaves a few fees out, among them the environmental **Green Fee** and the Maldives service and entry fee. Nitrox is also charged separately. Check the final list with Dive For Fun and bring that money separately, because these things are settled at the destination.

LUGGAGE

Maldivian domestic flights and transfers are tight on baggage allowance, and dive gear is heavy. Check your airline's allowance in advance and consider paying for extra baggage beforehand, which is much cheaper than at the counter. Computer, mask, credential and medications go in your carry-on, always.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Conduct in a Muslim country

> *The Maldives are an Islamic country with real rules. On board, almost none of this weighs on you; on land, it does.*

Sunni Islam is the official religion, and the legislation reflects that. There is a very clear separation between the **tourist islands**, resorts and live-aboards, where the rules are flexible, and the **inhabited islands**, including Malé, where they are not.

On land, on a local island or in Malé

- **Clothing**: shoulders and knees covered. No bikinis, swim briefs or crop tops outside the designated areas. Some local islands have a marked-out "bikini beach"; outside it, no.
- **Alcohol** is prohibited on inhabited islands and cannot be brought into the country. It is allowed only in resorts and on licensed vessels. Do not buy it at duty-free thinking you will bring it in: it is confiscated on arrival.
- **Public displays of affection**: discretion.
- **Photographing people**: ask first, always, and especially women and children.
- **Drugs**: extremely severe penalties. There is no gray area.

On board

On the boat, life is normal liveaboard life: swimwear, alcohol where there is a license, a free deck. The crew is Maldivian and Muslim, so the usual common sense applies: walking around the indoor and common areas in swim briefs or a bikini is bad manners, not a crime.

IF YOU HAVE TIME TO SPARE IN MALÉ

The capital fits into a two-hour walk. The **Hukuru Miskiy**, the old Friday Mosque, from 1658, is built of carved coral blocks and is the most important building in the country; cover your shoulders and knees and ask to go in. The **fish market**, in the late afternoon, is where the tuna that sustains the island comes in. And neighboring **Hulhumalé**, connected by bridge, is an entire island built on the reef, at the height at which the country is betting it will survive. Malé is an inhabited island: the clothing and alcohol rules apply.

THREE WORDS THAT HELP

Assalamu alaikum, the greeting. *Shukuriyaa*, thank you in Dhivehi. *Baraabaru*, all good, great. None of it is an obligation, but it changes the tone of every interaction of the week.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Photographing the Maldives

> *Warm water, strong light and big animals passing close by. It is one of the most generous destinations in the world for anyone who brings a camera, and one of the most frustrating for anyone who brings the wrong lens.*

Which lens

Wide-angle or fisheye for most of the week. The subject here is manta, shark, wall and schooling fish, and the water, even when clear, eats contrast and color from two or three meters out. The rule remains the same: get close and open up the angle.

Macro on one or two dives, on a shallow *giri* or in the late afternoon. Nudibranchs, shrimp, gobies and anemonefish justify swapping the port.

Manta

- Stay **low** and shoot **upward**. A manta against the surface is the image; a manta seen from above against the dark bottom is not.
- At the cleaning station, choose your position beforehand and then stop moving. She will come around again.
- For an identification photo, the whole belly, straight on, with the spots sharp. That is the one that counts as data.

- Flash on a manta's belly at close range bothers her. In clear water, natural light does the job.

Current

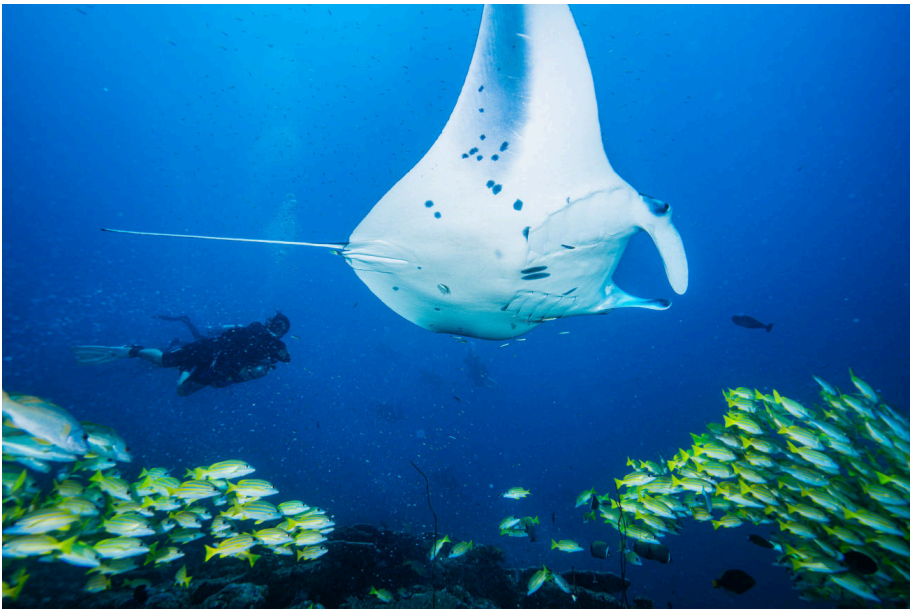
- With your hook set, you are stable and have both hands free. It is the best photo platform there is in a channel.
- **Tether the camera short.** On a drift, dangling equipment swinging about becomes a hammer against the coral.
- A faster shutter speed than you would use on a still reef: everything here moves, including you.

Night

Maaya Thila and Alimatha are dives with a lot of movement and little light. Focus with the video light, not the focus light on the strobe, and take care not to point strong light into the animals' eyes. At Alimatha, with dozens of sharks passing close by, the best photo is usually the widest and the lowest.

CHECKLIST

Batteries and chargers with a type D and G plug adapter (British standard, used in the Maldives), spare memory cards, spare o-rings and silicone grease, a soft brush for the sealing groove, silica gel and microfiber cloths. A leak test in fresh water on the first day, before the first real dive. And rinse the housing in fresh water every day: Indian Ocean salt is merciless on buttons. **Drone:** flying in the Maldives requires authorization from the civil aviation authority, and most boats and resorts do not allow it; without the paperwork in hand, leave it at home.



A manta passing over a school of snappers, with a diver in the background for scale.
Photo: Gabriel Vieira Costa, Maldives, November 2024.



PICTURE SECTION

November, central atolls

Thirteen photographs taken exactly where and when you will be, to calibrate expectations and to choose what to chase

ABOUT THE NEXT PAGES

How to look at this section

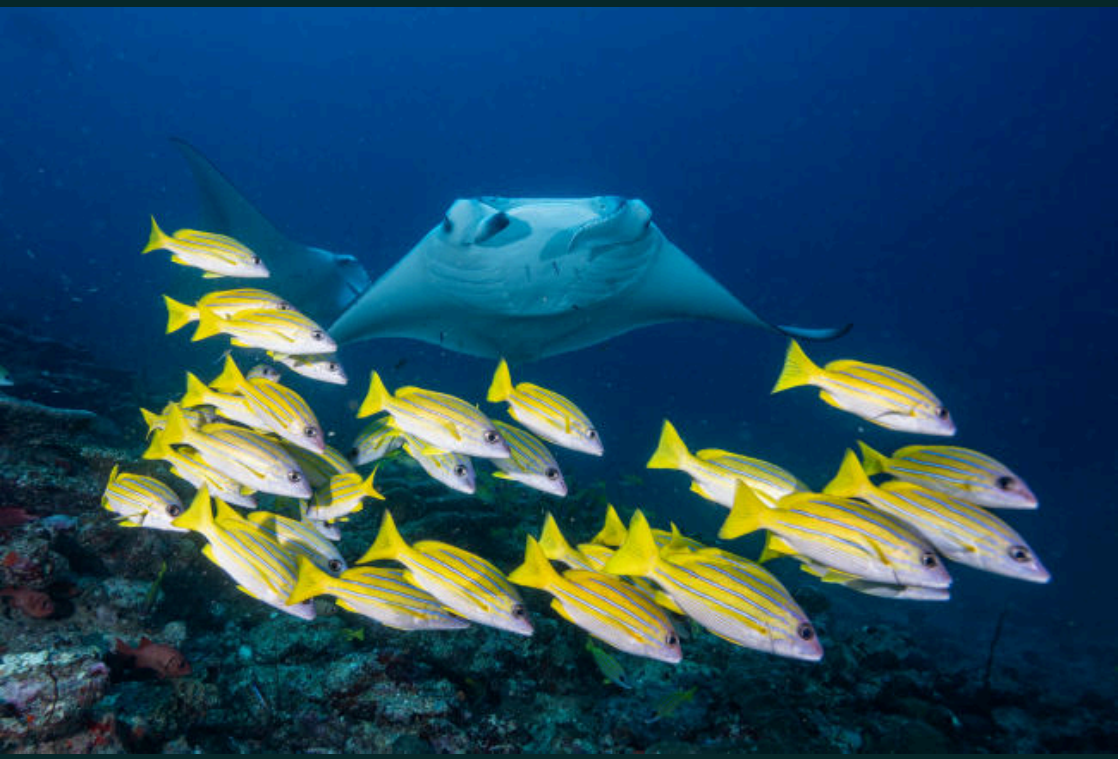
> *This is not a portfolio. It is a reference for what the same route, in the same month, delivered two years earlier.*

Travel guides tend to illustrate a destination with the best photo that exists of that place, taken by someone, some day, in some condition. The result is an expectation the trip almost never lives up to.

This section does the opposite. Every image that follows was taken in the central atolls of the Maldives, in **November 2024**, on the same route and in the same month as this expedition. The water you see is the water you will get. The visibility is what there usually is. The behaviors are the ones that happen at that time of year.

Look at them as technical reference, not as postcards. Notice the color of the water in the manta photos and compare it with the shark photos: they are different sites in the same atoll, one on the plankton side and the other on the clear-water side. Notice that almost every manta photo is taken **from below, looking up**. Notice that the channel photos have particles in suspension, and that it is precisely those particles that brought the animal in.

If an image here makes you want to learn how to take that photo, talk to Gabriel on board. That is what having a photographer on the staff is for.



Manta crossing above a school of bluestripe snappers. Both are there for the same reason: current bringing food. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Manta against the surface. The position is always the same: the photographer below, still, waiting for the animal to decide to pass. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Manta and diver on the night dive. The light concentrates the plankton, the plankton draws the manta, and the manta passes inches from whoever is holding the dive light.
Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Dozens of rays on the sandy bottom, with divers among them and the school passing overhead. Big animals, in numbers, a few meters deep and in natural light. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Napoleon wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*), the largest wrasse in the world, over two meters long as an adult. It is Endangered on the IUCN Red List and, on reefs where it is protected, loses its fear of anyone who keeps still. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



School of snappers holding over the sand, in the current. Alone, a schooling fish is prey; together, they become a wall the predator cannot decide where to attack. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Ball of glassfish. Thousands of individuals moving as a single body, a defense strategy that confuses the predator. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Clown triggerfish (*Balistoides conspicillum*). One of the most patterned fish in the ocean, and one of the hardest to approach. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Spotted eagle ray in blue water. They cross the channel in formation, always moving with the current. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Magnificent sea anemone, closed. When it retracts, the pink interior is exposed and becomes one of the best shallow photos on the Maldivian reef. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Lionfish hovering over a black gorgonian. Beautiful, slow and covered in venomous spines: photograph it all you like, do not touch. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Turtle over the reef, against the light from the surface. It will let you get close if you do not head straight toward it. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024



Macro on the rubble. Not everything in the Maldives has a five-meter wingspan, and the bottom between the pinnacles is where the small things are. Gabriel Vieira Costa · Maldives, November 2024

APPENDIX A

How the trip is organized

> *The shape of the week in the central atolls, which is always the same, and the logic behind the order of the dives.*

This appendix describes the design of the trip, not its schedule. Dates, flights, hotels and vouchers change from group to group and from year to year, which is why they live in the **online pre-trip guide** that Dive For Fun keeps up to date. What is here is what does not change.

Saturday to Saturday

The central route runs on a **fixed weekly cycle**. Boarding on Saturday, seven nights on board and disembarkation the following Saturday morning, at Malé airport. In between, up to **18 dives**, by day and by night.

The shape of the week

Boarding day	Welcome by the boat's crew, transfer by **dhoni** to the liveaboard, cabin assignments, general briefing and the first dinner on board.
North and South Malé	The first days. Channels and walls of the two Malé atolls, with whitetip reef sharks, mantas and schools of fusiliers, and the first strong-current **kandus**.
Felidhoo	Also called Vaavu. Big channels and, at night, the dive with **nurse sharks** at Alimatha.

Ari The classic **thilas**, the manta cleaning stations and the night dive at Maaya Thila. In the south of the atoll there is a chance to snorkel with whale sharks.

The last day Final dives in the morning, the sail back to Hulhumalé and the farewell dinner. After that, nobody dives again: the interval before flying begins.

> **THE ORDER OF THE ATOLLS IS NOT FIXED**
>
> The sequence above is the usual one, but the real one depends on the monsoon, the tide and the boat traffic that week. This is normal, and it is a good sign: it means the guide is choosing the site by the conditions, not by the spreadsheet.

What is usually included

- Seven nights aboard the liveaboard, full board
- Up to 18 dives in the week, day and night
- Dive guide and dhoni transfer on boarding day
- Dive For Fun staff along for the week, with underwater photography support

What is usually not included

- International airfare to Malé
- Green Fee, service charge and Maldivian taxes, paid on board
- Nitrox for the week
- Equipment rental

- **Dive insurance**, mandatory
- Drinks and personal extras
- Crew gratuity

General description of the trip format. What applies to yours is the contract and the voucher issued by Dive For Fun, and the times confirmed in the online pre-trip guide.

APPENDIX B

Species list

> *The species mentioned in the book, with scientific name and status on the IUCN Red List.*

Large pelagics, elasmobranchs and cetaceans

Common name	Scientific name	IUCN
Reef manta ray	*Mobula alfredi*	VU
Giant oceanic manta ray	*Mobula birostris*	EN
Whale shark	*Rhincodon typus*	EN
Gray reef shark	*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*	EN
Whitetip reef shark	*Triaenodon obesus*	VU
Tawny nurse shark	*Nebrius ferrugineus*	VU
Spotted eagle ray	*Aetobatus ocellatus*	VU
Pink whipray	*Pateobatis fai*	VU
Blacktip reef shark	*Carcharhinus melanopterus*	VU
Scalloped hammerhead	*Sphyrna lewini*	CR
Spinner dolphin	*Stenella longirostris*	LC

Reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	IUCN
Hawksbill turtle	*Eretmochelys imbricata*	CR
Green turtle	*Chelonia mydas*	EN

Reef fish

Common name	Scientific name	Note
Maldive anemonefish	*Amphiprion nigripes*	endemic
Napoleon wrasse	*Cheilinus undulatus*	EN
Clown triggerfish	*Balistoides conspicillum*	LC
Titan triggerfish	*Balistoides viridescens*	territorial
Bluestripe snapper	*Lutjanus kasmira*	LC
Emperor angelfish	*Pomacanthus imperator*	LC
Batfish	*Platax spp.*	
Lionfish	*Pterois spp.*	venomous
Stonefish	*Synanceia spp.*	venomous
Fire coral	*Millepora spp.*	stinging

CR critically endangered · EN endangered · VU vulnerable · LC least concern. IUCN Red List classifications, subject to revision.

APPENDIX C

Glossary

> *What you will hear in the briefings, in Dhivehi and in diving jargon.*

Dhivehi

Atholhu

Atoll. It is the Maldivian word that became a scientific term the world over.

Kandu

Channel cutting through the rim of the atoll. Every site with “kandu” in its name is a current dive.

Thila

Submerged pinnacle, with the top typically between 5 and 15 meters.

Giri

Shallower pinnacle, which almost reaches the surface.

Faru

Reef forming the rim of the atoll.

Finolhu

Sandbank.

Fushi · Dhoo · Rah

Three endings that mean island. Kudarah is “small island”; Embudhoo, Guraidhoo and Bandos follow the same logic.

Kuda · Bodu

Small and big. Kuda Thila, Bodu Thila, Bodu Hithi.

Madi · Madivaru

Ray, and “reef of the rays”. Lankan Madivaru and Rangali Madivaru are manta sites.

Miyaru

Shark. Hence “Miyaru Kandu”, the shark channel.

Dhoni

Traditional Maldivian wooden boat. On liveaboards, it is the support boat you dive from.

Rufiyaa

The currency of the Maldives.

Iruvai · Hulhangu

The northeast monsoon (dry, Dec to Apr) and the southwest monsoon (wet, May to Nov).

Diving and science

Bleaching

Loss of the symbiotic algae by the coral in response to heat stress. The white skeleton becomes visible. Reversible if the temperature drops quickly.

Drift

Dive in which the group moves with the current and is picked up at another point.

Negative entry

Entry with the BCD empty, to sink immediately and not be carried off on the surface.

Cleaning station

Fixed spot on the reef where cleaner fish remove parasites from larger animals, which arrive and wait their turn.

Photo-identification

Method of identifying individuals by unique natural patterns, such as the spots on a manta's belly.

Reef hook

Short line with a hook, attached to dead rock, that keeps the diver still in a current without effort.

Cephalic lobes

The two flaps at the front of a manta's head, which it unrolls to funnel water and plankton into its mouth.

Nitrox (EANx)

Mix with more oxygen than air, which widens the decompression margin on repetitive dives.

SMB

Surface marker buoy launched from the bottom. Mandatory on drifts: the dhoni looks for a buoy, not a head.

Subsidence

The slow sinking of a volcanic island. It is the mechanism of the atoll formation model proposed by Darwin in 1842.

APPENDIX D

Sources

Where the numbers in this book came from.

1. **Darwin, C. (1842).** *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs*. Source of the subsidence model for atoll formation.
2. **Official data of the Republic of Maldives** and geographical literature: 1,192 islands, 26 natural atolls, 871 km north-to-south extent, 298 km² of dry land, average elevation of about 1.5 m, exclusive economic zone of 923,322 km².
3. **Marine biodiversity surveys of the Maldives:** 187 species of coral, 1,100 of fish, 5 of turtle, 21 of whale and dolphin, 400 of mollusk and 83 of echinoderm.
4. **Manta Trust** and **Maldives Manta Conservation Programme**. Biology of *Mobula alfredi*, behavior at cleaning stations and while feeding, and the photo-identification catalog by ventral pattern.
5. **Government of the Maldives.** Total ban on shark fishing throughout the exclusive economic zone, decreed in March 2010, and ban on the import and export of fins.
6. **Government of the Maldives and High Court.** Gulper shark fishing regulation published in the Government Gazette in 2025 (up to 40 vessels, outside the atolls, season from December to June) and constitutional petition against it accepted in July 2026. CITES, CoP20 (November 2025): listing of *Centrophorus* in Appendix II.
7. **Presidential announcement of August 2025** on the reopening of gulper shark fishing (*Centrophorus* spp.) from November 2025, and the reactions of conservation organizations.
8. **Ministry of Environment of the Maldives and Manta Trust.** Creation of the Hanifaru Bay Marine Protected Area on 8 June 2009, with a visitor limit and a ban on scuba diving and fishing.
9. **UNESCO.** Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.
10. **Coral Reefs (2026).** Survey of the effects of the fourth global bleaching event (2023-2024) on 18 reefs in the Maldives: average drop of more than 40% in live hard coral cover in the central atolls, 57% on a lagoon reef in Ari, disproportionate loss of *Acropora*. Maldives Marine Research Institute: bleaching alert of 17 March 2024.
11. **Health Protection Agency of the Maldives.** Yellow fever guideline: certificate required from travelers arriving from countries with risk of transmission.

12. **Literature on coral bleaching in the Indian Ocean**, focused on the El Niño events of 1997-1998 and 2015-2016 and their effects on Maldivian reefs.
13. **IPCC.** Sea level rise projections and warning on the habitability of the Maldives by 2100.
14. **IUCN Red List.** Assessments of *Mobula alfredi*, *Mobula birostris*, *Rhincodon typus*, *Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*, *Triaenodon obesus*, *Nebrius ferrugineus*, *Cheilinus undulatus*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Aetobatus ocellatus*, *Pateobatis fai*, *Carcharhinus melanopterus* and *Sphyrna lewini*.
15. **Blue Force Fleet.** Published itinerary of the Maldives Central route: four atolls, 18 dives per week, Saturday boarding, Advanced Open Water requirement and about 50 logged dives.
16. **Dive For Fun.** Commercial page of the central atolls expedition, with the itinerary and the composition of the package.
17. **Divers Alert Network.** Recommendations on surface interval before flying after repetitive dives on a liveaboard.
18. **English Wikipedia**, entries “Maldives”, “Geography of the Maldives”, “Atoll”, “Manta ray”, “Whale shark”, “Baa Atoll”, “Kaafu Atoll”, “Vaavu Atoll” and “History of the Maldives”, used as a starting point and checked against the primary sources they cite.

A NOTE ON DISCREPANCIES

Three points deserve caution. The **highest point in the country** appears as 2.4 m in some sources and 5.1 m in others, and the book records both. The **date of the conversion to Islam** is given as 1153 or 1193 depending on the author. The length of the Chagos-Laccadive Ridge ranges from 2,350 to 3,000 km depending on where each author marks the ends; the book uses 2,500. And **coral mortality in 1998** has estimates that vary widely between atolls and between studies, which is why the book speaks in orders of magnitude and not in a fixed percentage.

APPENDIX E

Image credits

All the photographs in this book are by **Gabriel Vieira Costa** and were taken in the Maldives in **November 2024**, in the same atolls as this expedition and in the same month of the year.

This is unusual in a travel guide and it is a deliberate choice. There is no stock imagery, no photo from another region used to illustrate a species and no operator's promotional image. The light, the visibility, the density of life and the behavior of the animals that appear on these pages are those of November in the central atolls.

If on some dive the water looks greener than you expected, look at the photos in this book again: that is how it is, and it is precisely the plankton that brings the mantas.

The map of the atolls was drawn by **Dive For Fun** over the reefs and islands of **Natural Earth**, a public domain cartographic base (naturalearthdata.com). The diagrams of Darwin's stages and of the cross-section of a kandu are original illustrations by Dive For Fun.

USE OF THE IMAGES

The photos are the work of Gabriel Vieira Costa and are in this book for the participants of the expedition. For any use beyond that, publication, third-party social media, commercial material, talk to him first.

Notes



May the current be coming in, may the tide turn at the right time, and may she come up from below.

MALDIVES EXPEDITION · NOVEMBER 2026

Dive For Fun®

Gabriel Vieira Costa

A country of corals

One thousand one hundred and ninety-two islands built by microscopic animals on top of sunken volcanoes, in a country where the ground is a meter and a half high and the current is the main attraction. This book explains how an atoll is born, why the tide decides the day's plan, how not to scare off a manta and what exactly is at stake when the reef bleaches.

With original photography by Gabriel Vieira Costa,
made in the same atolls in November.

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