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2012-05-09

## Maldives Superyacht Cruising Itinerary - Extraordinary Explorations in the Maldives Archipelago



By Linda Cartlidge

The Maldives, one of the best and most fascinating travel destinations in the world, is fast emerging as a world favorite for a superyacht cruising journey.

Arriving at the Maldives Archipelago superyachts will encounter groups of 26 atolls in entirely natural formation, with only a small number inhabited, making up the chain of islands waiting to be discovered. The flat islands are formed from coral layers, the highest point rarely being more than 6' above sea level. Located in the Indian Ocean 670 km south-west of Sri Lanka and covering an area of 300 km, they are protected from monsoon devastation by barrier reefs and rarely suffer from major storms.

These Maldives archipelago miniscule coral islets of deep blue seas offer fantastic cruising adventures with the waterways providing the best and most natural of transport and overhead weather generally picture perfect - sunlit days, breezy nights, balmy mornings and iridescent sunsets.

Long stretches of sugar-white beaches are sanctuary to countless sea birds and extensive coral reefs host an endless variety of exotic fish and marine life. The islands provide a home for the annual migration of Whale Sharks and Mantra Rays and throughout the Maldives Whale Sharks are found patrolling very close to the surface, making the Maldives an ideal destination for snorkelers in any season.

The largest fish on the planet, the Whale Shark (*Rhincodon Typus*) can grow up to 40' in length and is a fascinating creature to behold. With no known predators (except humans) and a completely peaceful nature they are huge, harmless and sublime. Despite its incredible size the Whale Shark feeds, like its namesake, almost entirely on plankton and small fish. They are most plentiful near Baa Atoll through July and August, when plankton is at the highest level. Because they pose no real threat to humans, diving with these gentle giants in the Maldives has become a favorite adventure. Other gigantic fish often seen in the area include Manta Rays, Napoleon Wrasse and Reef Shark; and large Sea Turtles are relatively common.

Arriving Superyachts start their adventure at the Capital island of Malé, lying north and located among the miniscule coral islets of the Maldives' nature-rich archipelago. Asia Pacific Superyachts (APS) Maldives provides visiting vessels a wide range of services with a head office in Malé and branches in the Northern Part of HA, Uligan (North Thiladhunmathi Atoll) and the Southern Part of S. Gan (Addu Atoll). Mohamed Hameed, founder of APS Maldives and a multi-generational resident, and APS director, Arif Abdul Samad, offer the following sample itinerary for an extraordinary trip on your own yacht or on one of their charter yachts.

## **SAMPLE ITINERARY (courtesy of Asia Pacific Superyachts Maldives)**

### **1st Day Kuda Bandos**

Situated in Malé Atoll Kuda Bandos is a breathtaking island a shout away from the main island, Bandos. It is ideal for a first day private sunset beach picnic after reef snorkeling & swimming in a clear blue lagoon, as your boat's needs are all taken care of.

### **2nd Day Olhahali Island**



This beautiful island lies at the northern tip of North Malé Atoll on the north near One & Only Reetha Rah and offers the special attraction of the Olhahali Cave. There are several smaller caves and a big cave 40 metres long at a depth of 25 metres, the main attraction.

### **3rd Day Dusit Thani Resort on Mudhdhoo Island in Baa Atoll**



A beautiful sanctuary sheltered by nature amidst white sandy beaches and encircled by a turquoise lagoon, 100 top of the line guest villas are situated amongst the natural waterways. The Dusit Thani is fast becoming well known for frequent sightings of Dolphins and Sea Turtles and the resort's 'living house reef' is a snorkeler's paradise. Special dinners and sand spit picnics/set ups in their area for yacht guests and crew can be arranged as well as visits to the wonderful reef that surrounds Mudhdhoo (advance permission required).

### **4th Day Nibiliga Island**

A small but exclusive island and an add-on for those who wish to spend an extra day in the pristine natural beauty of Baa Atoll; Nibiligaa is one of the uninhabited islands of Baa Atoll. Located in the Mendhoo Region are: Nibiligaa Island and reef, Mendhoo Island and reef, Mendhoobinmathee Faru and Kaburu Faru.

### **5th Day Gemendhoo Island**

If time permits, Gemendhoo is a 'must visit' island before making the return journey to Malé. This beautiful and small island in Baa Atoll has one of the finest and cleanest of the beaches in the Maldives.

Major changes are being implemented to support conservation and preservation efforts in the above locations and throughout many of the beautiful areas in the Maldives. Among the important changes are those in the diving regulations at Hanifaru Bay at Baa Atoll, outlined under the "Hanifaru Management Plan" of the Baa Atoll Conservation Program.

A popular international dive location, the change at Hanifaru Bay from diving and snorkeling to 'only snorkeling' was made to minimise the potentially negative impact from divers on the Manta Rays and Whale Sharks; however, diving is still permitted on the outer area of Hanifaru Bay and the rest of Baa Atoll. Changes like these brought about the coveted distinction of the entire Baa Atoll being declared a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve – a distinction awarded to an area of natural excellence recognised for its unique harmony between man and nature. Many resorts are implementing practices to protect the reefs and marine life due to dire warnings of future danger and the Dusit Thani Maldives is one of the leaders in sustainable resort development in the Maldives; geared toward achieving a carbon-neutral programme and implementing structures to support the live coral reefs.