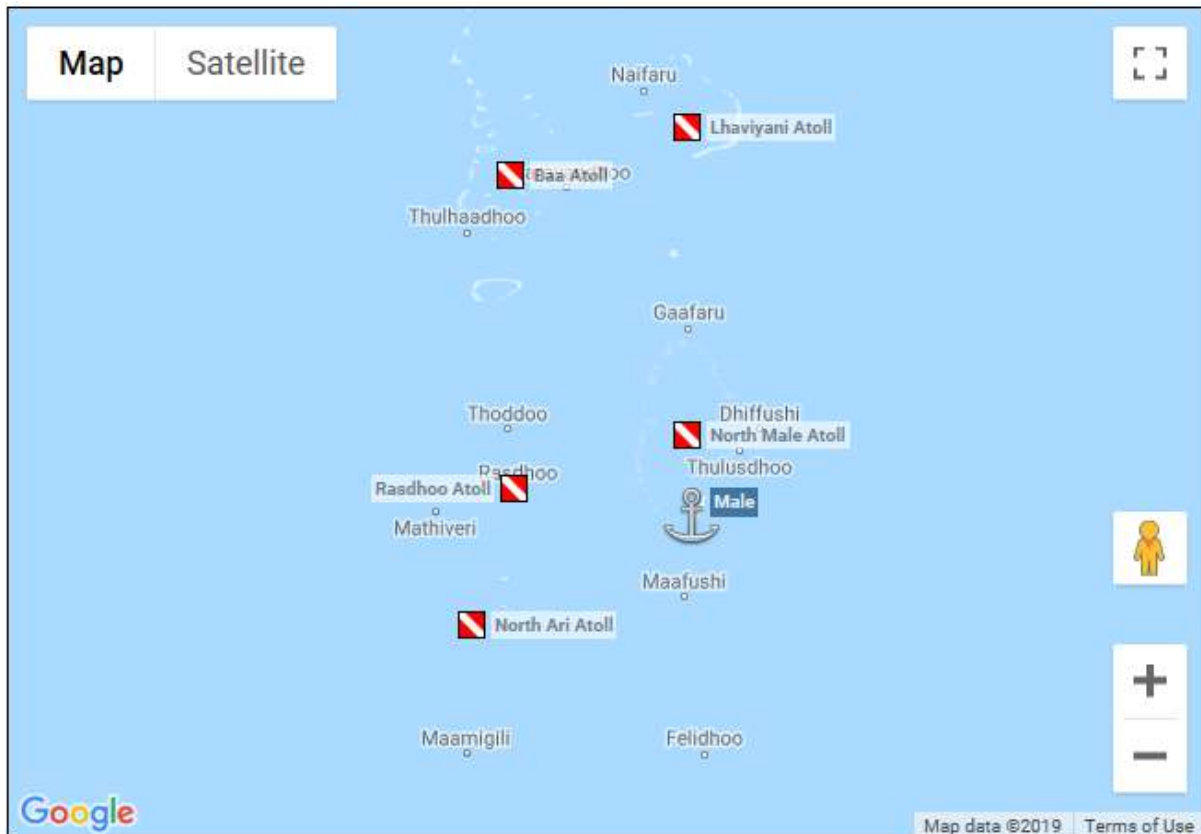


## Northern Hi-Lights (July - October)

10 day trips - Male to Male

*You don't need a minimum number of dives but you should be comfortable with drift dives as currents can be unpredictable and strong. If you are an Open Water Diver, some dives are below 18m therefore we recommend having advanced experience or taking your PADI Advanced Open Water course on board to maximise your enjoyment of the trip. Inexperienced and beginner divers may find some dives challenging and might be asked by the Cruise Director to skip dives that are not suitable for their diving experience. All diving is made from dhonis to give precise entry and exit points.*



- [North Male Atoll](#): Beautiful Pinnacles.
- [Lhaviyani Atoll](#): Fushivaru Thila, Kuredu Express, and Kuredu Caves
- [Baa Atoll](#): Hanifaruru Bay and Nelivaru Thila, Dhiggu Thila and many more
- [Rasdhoo Atoll](#): Hammerhead Dive, Beautiful Reef with Pelagics
- [North Ari Atoll](#): Grey Reef Sharks, Maaya Thila Night Dive, Multiple Manta Cleaning Stations

This itinerary combines some of the best and most famous dives sites from our Best of Maldives and Hanifaru & North itineraries, creating a trip with highlights from what is generally referred to as the 'Northern Atolls' and it delivers exactly that.

A diverse marine mix of reef animals, stony and soft corals, abundant macro life, marine turtles, manta rays and whale sharks awaits where you can get up close at the cleaning stations without disturbing the locals.

Some of the best channels for diving with Maldives reef sharks can be found in North Male. Often the best chances for whale shark and manta encounters can be found in Ari Atoll, such as at one of the best-known dive sites, Maaya Thila. For hammerheads, it's a visit to Rasdhoo Atoll in North Ari.

Although diving is not permitted in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hanifaru Bay, we are allowed to go in and snorkel with these gentle giants in the lagoon. After a manta has enjoyed its feed it needs to get cleaned, so we take you to known manta cleaning stations in both North Male and Baa Atoll. Hopefully these will give you sightings all week long. Of course, sightings can't be guaranteed but diving at this time means your chances are high.

## North Male Atoll

North Male Atoll is one of the most developed atolls in terms of hotel and resort development. There are at least 20 resort islands operating in the North Male Atoll. It is also home to some excellent diving spots.

Here are some possible sites you may visit:

- **Lankan Manta Point** - Lying along the channel reef of Lankanfushi (now Paradise Island Resort), this large block of coral is home to hundreds of cleaner wrasse. During the south west monsoon (May to November) the current runs from west to east, so the mantas feed on the outside of the eastern side of the Atolls. After they have had a feed, they come into cleaning stations such as Lankan Manta Point and get cleaned by the cleaner wrasse; a perfect chance for divers to get up close and personal with these majestic mantas.
- **Banana Reef** was the first dive site to be discovered in the Maldives continues to be one of the most popular. The dive, which ranges in depth from 5 to 30 meters, has several interesting characteristics including a pinnacle and some overhangs. Coral formations here are prolific and colorful, attracting an extensive variety of fish, including squirrelfish, bannerfish and oriental sweetlips. Currents can be strong at times around the reef, with occasional turbulence occurring around the overhangs. As such, the use of a surface balloon is recommended.
- **Kuda Haa** is a dramatic pinnacle, or thila, dive, which is widely considered one of the highlights of diving in the Maldives. Diving at Kuda Haa is at its best when the currents are not strong, when it is easy to navigate between the two parts of the pinnacle. Marine life to be expected at Kuda Haa is diverse and plentiful, including many macro species, including nudibranchs, flatworms, leaf fish and frogfish.

## Lhaviyani Atoll

Lhaviyani (or Faadhippolhu) Atoll is situated 120km north of Male and is relatively undeveloped with just 5 of its 58 islands dedicated to resorts. The diving here is famed for its thrilling channels, walls and reefs teeming with a myriad of marine life.

Here are some possible sites you may visit:

- **Kuredu Express** - This famous dive site gets its name from the strong currents that flow through the channel here. Reef terraces provide shelter to watch the grey reef sharks, tuna, eagle rays, sting rays, napoleons, schools of jack fish and barracuda that come to swim in the currents. Large bays in the outreef are scattered with soft corals, schools of humpback snappers and collared butterfly fish.
- **Kuredu Caves** - Famed for its overhangs starting at 8 metres and dropping down to 20 metres, this site is also known locally as 'Turtle Airport' due to the large numbers of resident green sea turtles. Soft corals covered in soldier fish coat the ceilings of the overhangs which are also home to lion fish, porcupine fish, leaf fish, scorpion fish and moray eels to name a few! The deeper ledges give an opportunity to hang with sting rays and huge napoleons.
- **Fushivaru Thila** - Fushivaru is described as one of the best diving areas in the Lhaviyani Atoll for its abundance and diversity, such as a manta cleaning station, grey reef shark sightings, interesting small cave formations and colourful unspoilt reefs. Fushivaru Thila is a protected area and a channel where you can find a large plateau covered by blocks of corals, which hosts a Manta rays cleaning station. In the central part of the pinnacle at around 15 meters, Mantas often swim by the blocks and you will have more chances to spot them during the outgoing current.

## Baa Atoll

Baa Atoll was designated as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve in June 2011. It harbors globally significant biodiversity in its numerous reefs and demonstrates a long history of human interaction with the environment. Covering approximately 139,700 ha of coastal/marine areas, the site is representative of the Maldives' high diversity of reef animals, with stony and soft corals, reef associated fish species, marine turtles, manta rays and whale sharks.

Here are some possible sites you may visit:

- **Hanifaru Bay** - The famous Hanifaru Bay, which is known locally as Vandhumaafaru Adi, is thought to be one the few places in the world where whale sharks congregate in to mate, although recent research suggests otherwise with the vast majority of the whale sharks seen there being young males. The bay also regularly sees some of the largest gatherings of Manta rays worldwide with up to one hundred individuals in the small inlet when the tide pushes plankton into the bay.
- **Nelivaru Thila** - With high chances of spotting Manta rays, especially during rising tides. The Thila (pinnacle) has several overhangs, with the most interesting parts are the west, east and south sides where you may encounter ghost pipefish, stingrays and Manta rays.
- **Dhigu Thila** - Dhigu in the Maldivian language means Long and Thila means pinnacle, and that is exactly what this dive site is, a long thin pinnacle in Baa Atoll, starting at 6m and descending down to 30m. Between 12 and 25m there are some interesting overhangs with some soft coral and Gorgonian Fan coral. Look out for Leaf Fish, Frog Fish and Stonefish, as well as nudibranchs, white tip reef sharks and perhaps the odd Manta passing in its way to it from Hanifaru Bay.

## Rasdho Atoll

The small atoll of Rasdho lies off the northeastern corner of Ari Atoll proper. The atoll's main island, also called Rasdho, is the administrative capital of North Ari Atoll, despite not being within the natural atoll itself. Good chance to see mantas on various dive sites throughout the year.

Here are some possible sites you may visit:

- **Madivaru (Hukrueli Faru)** - Madivaru is home to a very colorful coral reef. The site is named for the abundance of manta rays seen here (Madi means manta ray in the Maldivian language Dhivehi) during the northeast monsoon season. Depths range from 25 feet to almost 100 feet, making the dive particularly interesting and varied. Manta rays are attracted to Madivaru because of the strong currents that form a whirlpool effect in the deeper parts of the site, where the manta rays can hover over the currents. The mantas are also attracted to the several cleaning stations located around Madivaru.
- **Hammerhead Point** - Popular dive site for Maldives liveaboards. Its proximity to deep waters lends the location the best chances of getting close to these magnificent creatures. Often considered to be the highlight of many Maldives liveaboard trips.

## North Ari Atoll

Ari Atoll (also called Alif or Alufu Atoll) is one of natural atolls of the Maldives. It is one of the biggest atolls and is located in the west of the archipelago. The almost rectangular alignment spreads the islands over an area of about 89x30 kilometres. It has been divided in two sections for administrative purposes, Northern Ari Atoll and Southern Ari Atoll.

Here are some possible sites you may visit:

- **Hafsa Thila** - Known for its grey reef shark cleaning station, this site is like fish soup. Pick the side with the current, drop in and swim through the fish until you see the pinnacle. If the sharks are already on top of the pinnacle then simply stay there mesmerised by the sharks in circle. Dog-tooth tuna, bonito and giant travelly shepherd the thousands of fusiliers, which creates quite a spectacle when the bonito finally decide to go for the kill and when the others follow suit you can feel the energy of thousands of fish accelerating in unison.
- **Maaya Thila** - Maaya Thila is one of the most famous dive sites in the Maldives and is known as a great spot for both daytime and night-time scuba diving. The marine life depends largely on the currents, which vary greatly; when the currents are not strong, it is an easy dive site, suitable for less experienced divers, but when currents are strong Maaya Thila is recommended for only advanced divers and they will need to use a surface balloon.  
Maaya Thila is most famous for the white tip reef sharks that can nearly always be seen here, both during the day and night. A night dive at Maaya Thila also allows divers to encounter moray eels, turtles, octopus and stonefish.
- **Gangehi Kandhu** - Recommended only for advanced scuba divers, the Gangehi Kandhu dive site is located in the northern part of the Ari Atoll. Currents here can also be an issue, and the site should only be dived when the currents are flowing into the site. Gangehi Kandhu is known as one of the best dive sites in the Maldives for spotting sharks, including gray reef sharks, white tip reef sharks and the occasional leopard shark. Coral formations at this dive site are particularly colorful, and divers here can expect to see moray eels, nudibranch, mantis shrimp and trigger fish. Large pelagic species are also frequent visitors to the site.

- **Maalhos Thila** - Maalhos Thila is only suitable for experienced scuba divers because the best part of the dive site lies deeper than 25 metres. Maalhos Thila is an attractive dive spot, featuring several coral heads about 28 metres below the surface, all of which are covered with beautiful corals. Common visitors to the reef here include oriental sweetlips, white tip reef sharks and blue-lined snappers. Because of the strong currents at Maalhos Thila, a safety balloon must be deployed here to ensure the divers' safety.
- **Mushi Mas Mingili Thila (Fish Head)** - Fish Head, or Mushi Mas Mingili, is one of the most popular dive sites in Maldives. Prior to the site being declared an official Protected Marine Area by the Maldivian Government it was a common shark feeding spot among scuba divers. Marine life typically seen at Mushi Mas Mingili Thila includes gray reef sharks, white tips, napoleon wrasse, jacks and tuna.