

# Maldives



# MALDIVES

<b>Official Name:</b>	Republic of Maldives
<b>Capital:</b>	Male
<b>Area:</b>	115 square miles
<b>Population:</b>	301,475
<b>Language:</b>	Maldivian Divehi
<b>Religion:</b>	Islam
<b>Life Expectancy:</b>	Total Population: 62.9
<b>Official Exchange Rate:</b>	Rufiyaa per U.S. Dollar = 11.77 (fixed rate since 1995)



## Description:

Green represents the innumerable palm trees; the life source of the island. Red represents the blood of the nation's heroes in sacrifice. The white crescent is the symbol of Islamic faith.

## National Anthem of Maldives

Gavmii mi ekuverikan matii tibegen kuriime salaam,  
Gavmii bahun gina heyo du'aa

Kuramun Kuriimesalaam.

Gavmii nishaanang hurumataa ekuboo lambai tibegen  
Audaanakan libigen e vaa didaak kuriime salaam.

Nasraa nasibaa kaamyabuge ramzakang himenee  
Fessaa rataai hudaa ekii fenumun kuriime salaam.

*Adopted in 1972*

*Written by MOHAMED JAMEEL DIDI (1915-1989)*

### Translation

We salute our nation for national unity  
We offer prayers in the national language to salute the nation

We bow in respect to the emblem of our nation  
And salute the exalted flag

We salute the colors of our flag  
Green, red and white  
Symbolizing victory, blessings and success

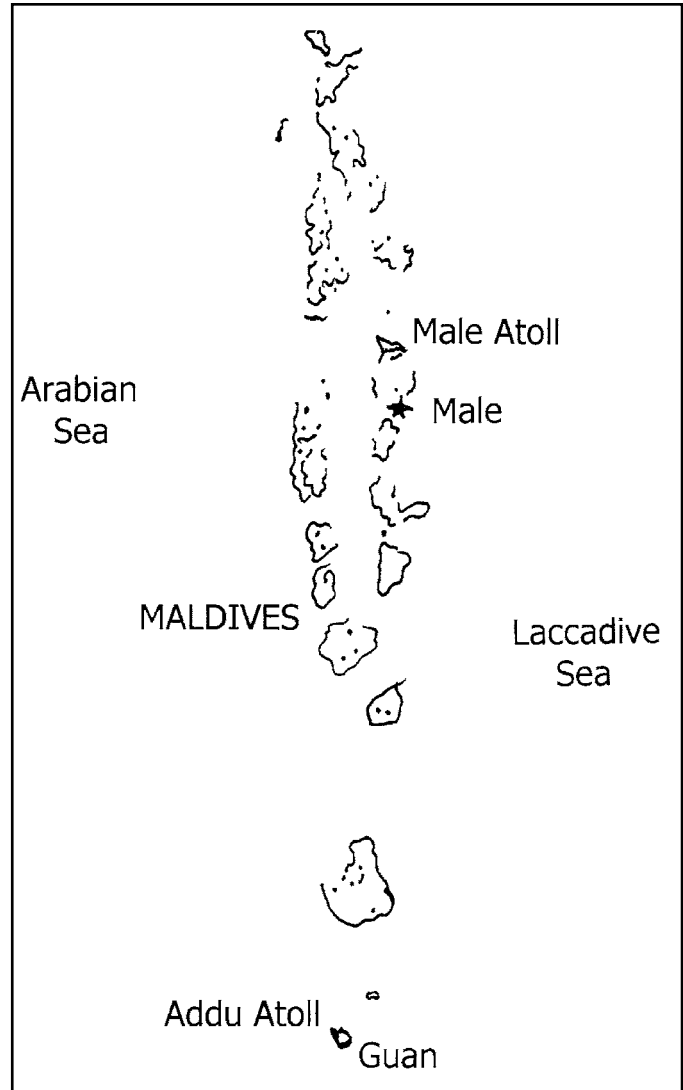
## Introduction

Maldives is an isolated nation and is among the smallest countries in the world. In olden times, these 1,200 islands provided the main source of cowrie shells, then used as currency throughout Asia and parts of the East African coast. Moreover, historically Maldives has had a strategic importance because of its location on the major marine routes of the Indian Ocean. Maldives' nearest neighbors are Sri Lanka and India, both of which have had cultural and economic ties with Maldives for centuries. Although under nominal Portuguese, Dutch, and British influences after the 16th century, Maldivians were left to govern themselves under a long line of sultans and occasionally sultanas.

Maldives gained independence in 1965. The British, who had been Maldives' last colonial power, continued to maintain an air base on the island of Gan in the southernmost islands until 1976. The British

departure in 1976 almost immediately triggered foreign speculation about the future of the air base; the Soviet Union requested use of the base, but Maldives refused.

The greatest challenge facing the republic in the early 1990s was the need for rapid economic development and modernization, given the country's limited resource base in fishing and tourism. Concern was also evident over a projected long-term rise in sea level, which could prove disastrous to the low-lying coral islands.



## History

### Redins

The origins of Maldivians are lost in history. Archeological finds indicate that the islands were inhabited as early as 1500 BCE and there are tales of a legendary sun-worshipping people called the Redin who may have been among the earliest explorers.

## **Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims**

The Redin were absorbed by Buddhists from Sri Lanka and Hindus from the Indian subcontinent around 500 BCE. The legend of the conversion to Islam in 1153 C.E remains a popular tale. According to legend, a sea *jinni* (demon) called Rannamaari, demanded regular sacrifices of young virgin girls in Male (capital of Maldives). Abu Al Barkat, a visiting North African Arab, took the place of a sacrificial virgin and drove the demon away. The Maldivian king accepted Islam and Abu Al Barkat later became the first sultan (king). A series of six sultanic dynasties followed – 84 sultans and sultanas. At one stage when the Portuguese first arrived in the 16th century, there were actually two ruling dynasties: the Malei and Hilali.

## **Portuguese**

The Portuguese were granted permission to build a fort and a factory in Malé, but it wasn't long before they wanted more from the Maldives. They were eager for a greater share of the profitable trade routes of the Indian Ocean.

In 1558, Captain Andreas Andre led a Portuguese invasion which killed Sultan Ali VI. Andre ruled Malé and much of the country for the next 15 years. Portuguese occupation came to a bloody end in 1573 when an island chief, Mohammed Thakurufaan, led an attack on the main Portuguese garrison and slew everyone.

## **Dutch and British**

In the 17th century, the Maldives came under the protection of the Dutch and later the British, but neither established a colonial administration.

In the 1860s *Borah* merchants from Bombay set up warehouses and shops in Malé, and quickly acquired an almost exclusive monopoly on foreign trade. Sultan Mohammed Mueenuddin II, weary of the Borahs' economic grip, signed an agreement with the British in 1867 which guaranteed the islands' full independence. The Maldives subsequently became a British protectorate, and allowed the British to establish defense facilities.

## **Constitution**

The sultanate (kingship) became an elected rather than a hereditary position when the islands' first constitution was drawn up in 1932. In 1953, the sultanate was abolished and a republic proclaimed with Amin Didi as the first president. Less than a year later Amin Didi was overthrown; the sultanate was returned with Mohammed Farid Didi elected as the 94th sultan of the Maldives. Around the same time, the British secured permission to re-establish its wartime airfield on Addu Atoll in the far south of the country. In 1956, the British Air Force began developing the base as a staging post, employing hundreds of Maldivians and undertaking the resettlement of the Gan islanders. But when Ibrahim Nasir was elected prime minister in 1957, he immediately called for a review of the agreement, demanding that the lease be shortened and the annual payment increased.

This was followed by an insurrection against the government by the inhabitants of Addu and Suvadiva (Huvadū) islands who objected to Nasir's demand that the British cease employing local labor. Influenced by the British presence, they decided to cut ties altogether and form an independent state. In 1962, Nasir sent gunboats to the southern islands and the

rebellion was suppressed. Britain recognized the islands' sovereignty soon after and in 1965, the Maldives became fully independent.

## Referendum

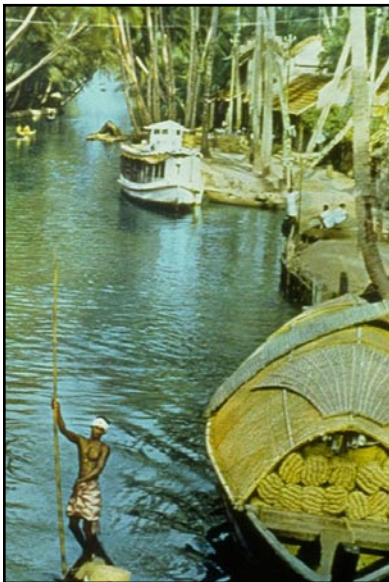
Following a referendum in 1968, the sultanate was again abolished and a new republic inaugurated with Ibrahim Nasir (former prime minister) as president. His autocratic rule ended a decade later when, fearing for his life, he fled the country for Singapore. The progressive Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was elected president in his place. Gayoom has been in power ever since, surviving coup attempts in 1980 and 1988. He was nominated for a fourth five-year term in 1993, and his presidency was confirmed by an overwhelming referendum.

## Present Situation

Recent years have been characterized by modernization, rapid economic growth, and improvement in most social indicators. The main contributors to this growth have been the fishing industry, tourism and foreign aid. There are pressures for political liberalization on one hand and for a more traditional Muslim way of life on the other. The government of Maldives is striving toward a balance between preservation of the environment and further economic development.

## Geography

The group of 1,200 islands lies in the Indian Ocean, between just south of the equator and 8 degrees north, about 419 miles southwest of Sri Lanka. About 200 islands are inhabited. The total area including land and sea is about 34,749 square miles.



The group of islands in the ocean is 511 miles long and 80.74 miles at its greatest width. They are divided into 19 administrative regions, known as “atolls.” Most islands have a shallow lagoon, known in Maldivian as a “*villu*.”

The islands are very small, many being no more than two meters above sea level. The islands are formed from the growth of coral over long-submerged mountain ranges. These are true coral islands, with no other forms of rocks or minerals visible or within easy reach. As a result, beaches are covered with white coral sand with no trace of yellow or black as seen anywhere else in the world. The protective coral reef surrounding every island is also home to hundreds of species of tropical fish, countless shapes and sizes of coral sea shells and all forms of marine life.

There are no hills, mountains or rivers in the Maldives. The islands are small, and the totally coral based soil is poor in essential nutrients. Therefore, there is no room for thick jungle. Very few terrestrial fauna are represented because of the difficult conditions. The major diversity is found in the sea.

## Climate

The climate, which is determined by two monsoons, is warm and humid. The rainy South-West monsoon begins during April and continues until October, while the North-East Monsoon prevails from December to March. The islands are located away from any significant seismic activity, and also are situated away from typhoon or cyclone areas.



## Government And Administration

The president heads the executive branch and appoints the cabinet. He is nominated to a 5-year term by a secret ballot of the *Majlis* (parliament). The president must be confirmed by a national referendum. The unicameral *Majlis* is composed of 48 members serving 5-year terms. Two members from each atoll (administrative divisions) and Male (capital) are elected directly by universal suffrage. Eight are appointed by the president.

The Maldivian legal system – derived mainly from traditional Islamic law – is administered by secular officials, a chief justice, and lesser judges on each of the 19 atolls, who are appointed by the president and function under the Ministry of Justice. There also is an attorney general. Each inhabited island within an atoll has a chief who is responsible for law and order. The chief of each administrative group of islands is, appointed by the president, who functions as a district officer.

Maldives has no organized political parties. Candidates for elective office run as independents on the basis of personal qualifications.

## Economy

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**GDP:** \$594 million (2000 est.)

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**GDP Growth Rate:** 7.6% (2000 est.)

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**Inflation Rate:** 3%

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**Industries:** Fish processing, tourism, shipping, boat building, coconut processing, garments, woven mats, rope, handicrafts, coral and sand mining

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**Agriculture:** Coconuts, corn, sweet potatoes, fish

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**Exports:** \$88 million

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**Export Products:** Fish, clothing

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**Export Partners:** United States, United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, Japan

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**Imports:** \$372 million annually

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**Imports Commodities:** Consumer goods, intermediate and capital goods and petroleum products

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**Import Partners:** Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, Japan and Canada

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**Currency Name:** Rufiyaa

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**Currency Code:** MVR

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**Exchange Rates:** Rufiyaa per U.S. Dollar = 11.77 (fixed rate since 1995)

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## Overview of Economy

Tourism, Maldives largest industry, accounts for 20% of GDP and more than 60% of the Maldives' foreign exchange receipts. Over 90% of government tax revenue comes from import duties and tourism-related taxes.

Fishing is a second leading sector. The Maldivian Government began an economic reform program in 1989 initially by lifting import quotas and opening some exports to the private sector. Subsequently, it has liberalized regulations to allow more foreign investment. Agriculture and manufacturing continue to play a minor role in the economy, constrained by the limited availability of cultivable land and the shortage of domestic labor. Most staple foods must be imported.

Industry, which consists mainly of garment production, boat building, and handicrafts, accounts for about 18% of GDP. Maldivian authorities worry about the impact of erosion and possible global warming on their low-lying country; 80% of the area is one meter or less above sea level.

## Education

Education structure consists of primary (classes one through five), secondary (classes six through ten), and higher secondary (classes eleven and twelve). Most students attend private Quranic schools that charge fee in contrast to free government schools. There is no university but some vocational education. Students seeking higher education must go abroad to a university.

Maldives has three types of schools: Quranic schools, Dhivehi-language primary schools, and English-language primary and secondary schools. Schools in the last category are the only ones equipped to teach the standard curriculum.

In 1992, approximately 20 percent of government revenues went to finance education, a significant increase over the 1982 expenditure of 8.5 percent. Part of the reason for this large expenditure results from recent increases in the construction of modern school facilities on many of the islands. In the late 1970s, faced with a great disparity between the quality of schooling offered in the islands and in Male, the government undertook an ambitious project to build one modern primary school in each of the nineteen administrative atolls. The government in Male directly controls the administration of these primary schools. Literacy is reportedly high; the claimed 1991 adult literacy rate of 98.2 percent would make Maldives the highest in South Asia.

In 1975, the government, with international assistance, started vocational training at the

Vocational Training Center in Male. The training covered electricity, engine repair and maintenance, machinery, welding, and refrigeration. Trainees were chosen from among fourth and fifth-grade students. In the atolls, the Rural Youth Vocational Training Program provided training designed to meet local needs in engine repair and maintenance, tailoring, carpentry, and boat building.

International organizations enabled the creation of the Science Education Center in 1979 and an Arabic Islamic Education Center opened in 1989. Japanese aid enabled the founding of the Maldives Center for Social Education in 1991. In the latter half of 1993, work began on the Maldives Institute of Technical Education to help eliminate the shortage of skilled labor.

## Culture and Society

**Population:** 320,165

**Population Growth Rate:** 2.9%

**Life Expectancy at Birth:** Total population: 62.9; female: 64.2 years; male: 61.7 years

**Ethnic Groups:** South Indians, Sinhalese, Arabs

**Religions:** Sunni Muslim

**Languages:** Maldivian Dhivehi (dialect of Sinhala, script derived from Arabic); English spoken by most government officials

**Literacy:** Age 15 and over can read and write; total population: 93.2%; male: 93.3%; female: 93%

### Ethnic Groups

The contemporary homogeneous mixture of Sinhalese, Dravidian, Arab, Australasian, and African ethnicity in Maldives results from historical changes in regional hegemony over marine trade routes. Clarence Maloney, an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in Maldives in the 1970s, determined that an early Dravidian-speaking substratum of population from Kerala in India had settled in the islands, leaving its legacy in the language and place-names. This group was subsequently displaced by Dhivehi-speakers who arrived from Sri Lanka and whose language became the official one. Arabs compose the last main group to arrive beginning in the ninth century. However, a rapidly disappearing endogamous subgroup of persons of African origin called the *Ravare* or *Giraavaru* also existed.

The only distinct ethnic minority is found in Male among the trading community of Indians, who settled there in the 1800s. Several hundred in number, they are also a religious minority, belonging to the Shia branch of Islam. In addition, a small number of Sri Lankans have come to Maldives in recent years to work in the tourist resorts because Maldivians, as devout Muslims, refuse to work in facilities serving alcoholic beverages. This situation has created some resentment on the part of local Maldivians facing unemployment.

Though performances of traditional music and dance are not everyday events, there is a contemporary Divehi culture which is strong and adaptive, despite foreign influences which range from Hindi movies and East Asian martial arts to Michael Jackson and Muslim fundamentalism. Western fashions, pop music and videos are visible in the capital, but on public occasions, like the beginning and end of Ramadan, the celebrations always have a distinctly Maldivian touch. There are three daily newspapers and several magazines in the unique national language, rock bands who sing Divehi lyrics, and multi-storey buildings which echo the architecture of Maldivian island houses.

## Dance and Music



A *bodu beru* means a big drum, and gives its name to the best known form of traditional music and dance. It can be quite sophisticated and compelling. Dancers begin with a slow, nonchalant swaying and swinging of the arms, and become more animated as the tempo increases, finishing in a rhythmic frenzy. There are four to six drummers in an ensemble, and the sound has strong African influences. Contemporary local bands usually incorporate elements of *bodu beru*, the classical Maldivian music in their music, with lots of percussion and extended drum solos.

## Food

Fish and rice are the staple foods of Maldivians with meat and chicken eaten only on special occasions. National dishes include fried fish, fish curry and fish soup. Arecanut (an oval nut chewed with betel leaf, cloves and lime) is the equivalent of an afterdinner mint. Alcohol is only available in tourist resorts. The local brew is *raa*, a sweet and delicious toddy tapped from the crown of the palm trunk. Apart from coconuts, there are very few fruits and vegetables grown on the islands, so most of the food served is imported.



## Language

The language, Maldivian Dhivehi, belongs to the Indo-European language family. Derived from Elu, an archaic form of Sinhalese (the language of Sri Lanka), it has numerous words that have been taken from Arabic, Hindi and Tamil. It has contributed one word, "atoll," to international usage. In Dhivehi, the numbers from one to twelve are of Sinhalese origin, and after twelve, Hindi. The names of the days are Sinhalese and Hindi. The names of persons are Arabic.

Dhivehi is spoken throughout the islands. However dialect differences are pronounced in the four southernmost atolls.

The traditional script, *Thaana*, is written from right to left. This locally invented script contains twenty-four letters, the first nine of which are forms of the Arabic numerals. In 1977, a Romanized script was introduced to be used along with *Thaana* for official correspondence, but since 1979, the requirement is no longer mandatory.

## Religion

Maldivians are Sunni Muslims; adherence to Islam, the state religion since the 12th century, is required for citizenship. The importance of Islam in Maldives is further evident in the lack of a secular legal system. Instead, the traditional Islamic law code of sharia, known as *sariatu*, forms the basic law code of Maldives as interpreted to conform to local Maldivian conditions by the president, the attorney general, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the *Majlis* (parliament). On the inhabited islands, the *miski*, or mosque, forms the central place where Islam is practiced.

Most inhabited islands have several mosques; Male has more than thirty. Most mosques are whitewashed buildings constructed of coral stone with corrugated iron or thatched roofs.

The isolation of Maldives from the historical centers of Islam in the Middle East and Asia has allowed some pre-Islamic beliefs and attitudes to survive. There is a widespread belief in *jinn*s, or evil spirits. For protection against such evils, people often resort to various charms and spells. The extent of these beliefs has led some observers to identify a magico-religious system parallel to Islam known as *fandita*, which provides a more personal way for the islanders to deal with either actual or perceived problems in their lives.

## Festivals

### Religious Holidays

These holidays are based on the Islamic lunar calendar and the dates vary from year to year.

#### Ramadhan

Ramadhan (known locally as *rordamas*) is the ninth month in the Muslim calendar, a month during which Muslims mark 30 days of fasting. Fasting is one of the five basic tenants of Islam. During a fast one does not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. It is required that one should show tolerance, strictly follow the moral obligations including restraining one's anger and offer prayers during fasting.

The working hours are altered for the month, the government offices being opened from 9:00 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. and the private sector also closing for the day at 3:00 in the afternoon.

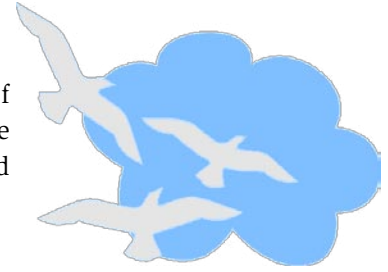


#### Kuda Eid

Kuda Eid is the first day of the month of Shawwal in the Islamic Calendar. This follows the end of Ramadhan which is a period of feasting. Early in the morning men and women gather at the mosque to pray. At each house feasting is prepared and family, friends and neighbors are invited. This is also a period of charity, when families offer Zakath (one of the bases of Islam according to which 2.5% of one's wealth should be given for welfare, every year) to those less fortunate. Kuda Eid is celebrated for the period of three days during which a public holiday is observed.

### **Prophets Birthday**

The Prophet Muhammad's birthday is the 12th day of *Rabee-ul Awwal* in the Islamic Calendar. Families invite one another to their homes to share the special dishes prepared for the day.



### **Eid-al-Azha**

Eid-al-Azha falls on the 10th day of *Zul Hijja* in the Islamic Calendar. While those who can afford to go on pilgrimage to the holy city of Kaaba in Mecca, for those who stay behind it is a time for celebrations and feasting.

This is the longest holiday during the year and people make preparations well in advance to visit their friends and relatives in other islands. The holiday period is between five to seven days. All over the Maldives the period is one of celebrations. Traditional sports, music and dance go hand in hand with modern sports and music. The young, old, male and female take part in the celebrations.

### **Other Holidays**

#### **Independence Day**

Independence Day is celebrated on the 26th of July. The highlight of the day is the official celebrations held in the evening at the Republic Square. The event begins with a march past by the National Security Service and the National Cadet Corps. This is followed by drills, traditional dances and modern drills performed by hundreds of school children in colorful attire. These events are interceded by the passing of floats and processions depicting traditional and modern themes.

#### **National Day**

The National Day celebrates the great victory of Mohamed Thakurufaanu over the Portuguese in 1573. The National Day is celebrated on the 1st of *Rabee-ul Awwal*, the third month in the Islamic calendar

#### **Victory Day**

This is celebrated for the victory over Sri Lankan mercenaries who tried to overthrow the Maldivian government on November 3, 1988.

#### **Republic Day**

On November 11, 1968, Maldives became a republic for the second time. The day is celebrated every year with parades and marches.



## Sports

The resorts in the Maldives offer a wide variety of water sports both for Maldivians and tourists. Diving and snorkeling are the main sports. Some resorts have professional windsurf schools with qualified instructors offering multilingual certified courses. Windsurf schools or water sports centers offer the chance of testing the skills to the limits, at water-skiing, jet skiing, parasailing, body surfing and knee boarding.



### Night Fishing

A unique Maldivian sport, night fishing, provides a quiet, relaxing time under the stars out at sea, rocking gently to the waves, in addition to the excitement of fishing. In night fishing, the boat is anchored at a reef just before sunset. Lines are tethered with hooks and sinkers and dropped over board. The favorite catch is red snapper.

### Windsurfing

The large lagoons that surround most of the islands are ideal for windsurfing. Large lagoons with waist deep water for hundreds of meters with soft sandy bottoms and the protective barrier provided by the house reef, offer ideal, safe conditions for windsurfing.



### Snorkeling



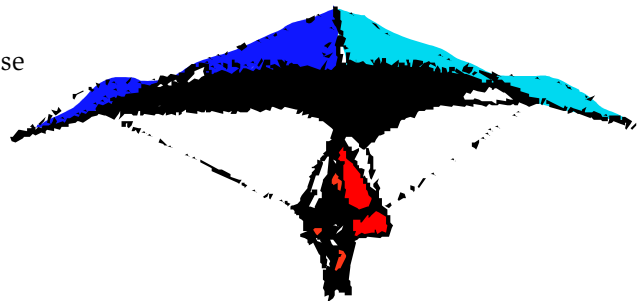
Each island offers a beautiful house-reef for snorkeling. Boats can take snorkellers to the reef. What lies under the water is a veritable wonder of nature. The variety and abundance of colorful fish in the reefs surrounding the islands is incredible.

### Water-skiing

Water-skiing is another sport that fascinates both tourists and locals because of the clear water around the islands.

### Parasailing

Parasailing is ideal for those adventurous enough to try it. In addition to the excitement of being high up over the islands, it gives a fantastic aerial view of the surroundings.



## Arts And Crafts

Maldivians are deft craftsmen producing beautifully crafted pieces mostly out of what is available locally. Although many of the skills are now a thing of the past, several skills have been passed on from generation to generation and live on even today.

While many crafts have become obsolete, others have found new life with the advent of tourism. The production of ornaments from tortoise shells and black coral once valued by visitors has now ceased completely because of the growing awareness among the public on the need to preserve the environment.

## Calligraphy

The art of calligraphy has strong connections with Islam. Old and new mosques display beautifully penned verses from the Holy Quran. The Islamic Centre exhibits some of the finest samples of the work of modern calligraphers in the country.

## Wooden Lacquer Ware

Perhaps the most distinctive of the Maldivian handicrafts, are almost exclusively produced in Thulhaadhoo in Baa Atoll. *Liye Laajehun*, as it is called in Dhivehi, involves the process of shaping, and hollowing out pieces of wood to form beautifully crafted boxes, containers and ornamental objects. Made from local fauna (Alexandrian laurel) which grows abundantly throughout the country, they come in various shapes and sizes; small pillboxes, vases of various sizes, jewelry boxes and cigar cases. These elegant pieces are lacquered in strands of red, black and yellow resin and delicately carved with flowing flowery patterns.

## Mats

Beautiful reed mats are woven throughout the country, the most famous of which are those that are woven by women of Gadhdhoo in Gaafu Dhaalu. *Thundu Kunaa* as they are known in Dhivehi ranges in size from that of a place mat to a full sized single mattress. The women of Gadhdhoo collect the reeds called *haa* from the nearby island of Fioari. They are dried in the sun and stained with natural dyes, the color varying from fawn to black. These mats with their intricate, abstract designs are woven on a handloom according to the imagination and skill of the weaver.



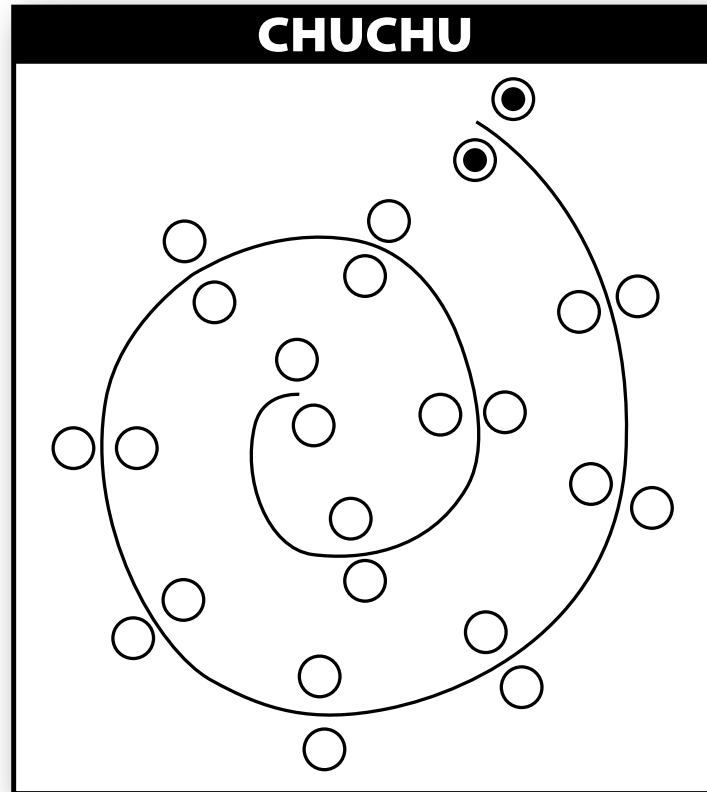
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# Floral Design Coloring Project



## How To Play “Chuchu” -A Maldivian game

<b>Playing area:</b>	The game is traditionally marked on sand, but it may also be marked with chalk on a sidewalk or on paper
<b>Number of players:</b>	Ten or more, divided into two equal teams
<b>Materials:</b>	Three stones of different colors



A spiral is drawn in the sand with pairs of holes marked along it on either side. Players vary the number of holes according to how long they want the game to last, but they make at least 10 pairs of holes. They put a stone in each of the outmost holes, one for each team. The team’s stones advance to the center of the spiral according to their skill in guessing which member of the other team is hiding the playing stone.

One member of the first team takes the playing stone, and each player on that team puts his palms together. The leader pretends to give the stone to each, but only really gives it to one. The members of the other team decide together who has the stone. If they are correct, their stone moves forward one space on the spiral. Whether the guess is right or wrong, the right to hide the stone passes to the second team, and the first team guesses, and so on until one team’s stone reaches the last hole of the spiral, and they are declared the winners.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Calligraphy Coloring Project

Color the calligraphic design and ornamental bowl.

