



## The Good Life

Experience the best of Maldives' world-class diving aboard the luxurious *Four Seasons Explorer* ■ BY ADAM BROADBENT

With nearly 1,200 picture-postcard islands home to countless dive sites beneath its turquoise waters, the Maldives has long been one of diving's "bucket list" destinations. Ever since the first resort — Kurumba Village Tourist Resort in North Malé — opened its doors in 1972, stories of the most remarkable high-energy encounters have continued to lure divers: Aggregations of feeding whale sharks and manta rays, schools of gray reef sharks, soft-coral-covered thilas and coral-encrusted reefs ensure that

your logbook will be stuffed with truly memorable underwater memories.

As the best dive sites are spread throughout the island-nation's roughly 35,000 square miles, it makes sense to experience the Maldives by boat. **Live-Aboards** And there's no better way than on the decadent *Four Seasons Explorer*. This 128-foot-long, three-deck catamaran with 11 spacious staterooms (limited to 22 passengers) will immerse you in an environment of complete relaxation, luxury and security — the *Four Seasons*

Manta rays come to feed by the dozens at Donkalo Thila, in the Maldives' South Ari Atoll.

*Explorer* is a unique five-star floating paradise that will carry you in inimitable Four Seasons style.

The *Four Seasons Explorer* is one of the fastest live-aboards in the Maldives, able to offer an extensive itinerary that covers a range of the central atolls, which includes North Malé and South Malé atolls, North Ari and South Ari atolls, Rasdhoo Atoll and Baa Atoll. As the marine life moves to adapt with the seasons, so does the boat and its schedule, guaranteeing you the best the Maldives has to offer. Each atoll excels in particular styles of diving: Baa Atoll and North Ari Atoll feature

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: JASON ISLEY/SCUBAZOO (2); COURTESY PETER MEALIN/FOUR SEASONS HOTELS AND RESORTS; OPPOSITE: JASON ISLEY/SCUBAZOO

action-packed thilas, while Rasdhoo and South Malé atolls are highlighted by a number of exhilarating channel dives. Many guests opt to do a three- or four-day cruise, using it as a transfer between the Four Seasons' two island resorts, but the full-week trip provides the most complete balance of Maldives' best diving and culture.

Daily schedules offer a range of activities: guided snorkels over pristine reefs, encounters with some of the oceans' greats — including whale sharks, manta rays and eagle rays — during the three dives a day, water-skiing or just sunbathing on one of the Four Seasons' many private islands. If you need a bit of down time after all the activities, a jetted tub on the second deck and sun loungers on the top



Blackspotted sea cucumber.



A whip coral goby in South Malé.



The *Four Seasons Explorer*.

### Itinerary

**Day One** Board *Four Seasons Explorer* and set sail for Kagi Island. Captain's cocktails and lobster dinner at sunset.

**Day Two** Sail to Baa Atoll. Spend the day diving colorful 1 Muthafushi Thila and enjoy a private beach day, which includes a sumptuous (and unforgettable) beach barbecue dinner.

**Day Three** Dives at various thilas in Baa to see manta rays, turtles and gray

reef sharks. Tour Kendhoo Island to see the house of 11th-century scholar Abu al-Barakat, plus a traditional dance.

**Day Four** Guests on half-week cruises disembark at the Four Seasons at Landaa Giraavaru. Dives throughout the day with, when in season, a visit to 2 Hanifaru Bay, renowned for its manta ray and whale shark feeding aggregations.

**Day Five** Rasdhoo and North Ari atolls will provide dives at some of

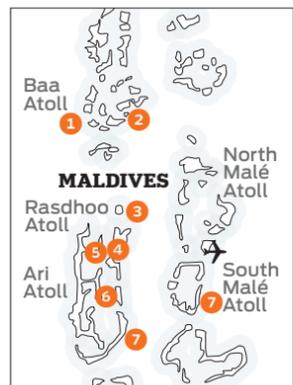
the most famous sites, including 3 Rasdhoo Madivaru, 4 Fish Head, 5 Maaya Thila and 6 Hafsa Thila.

**Day Six** The highlight of this day is a wreck dive at 7 Machchafushi, home to the most pristine coral reef in South Ari atoll, and possibly the entire Maldives.

**Day Seven** South Malé atoll for a dive on 8 Kandooma Thila, a great opportunity to see gray reef sharks being cleaned, schools

of spotted eagle rays plus manta ray cleaning stations nearby. End with another beach barbecue dinner — a perfect end to the perfect cruise.

**Day Eight** Disembark at Four Seasons at Kuda Huraa resort.



deck allow you to just relax and soak in the sun and views.

Night dives are normally spent rummaging around in nooks and crannies. The night dive at Hafsaa Thila is one of the highlights of the week, as you come face to face with dozens of white-tip sharks, hawksbill turtles, hunting moray eels, lionfish and squid. Between August and October, visits to the now famous Hanifaru Bay will regularly provide encounters with huge feeding



**Schools of golden sweepers mass under the reef at one of the Maldives' most famous sites, South Ari's Maaya Thila.**

aggregations of manta rays and whale sharks — on the same dive. The sharks hang in the water column gorging on the plankton like 30-foot-long Hoover vacuums, while the manta rays spin, loop and pirouette in a breathtaking underwater ballet. Fabulous wrecks include the *Maldives Victory*, which sank in the shadow of the country's international airport, and Lhaviyani Atoll's Shipyard, which is actually two wrecks on one dive.

With a relaxed and friendly mood maintained by the professional crew, you're more than likely to meet other guests on their third or fourth trip — a testament to the excellence and memories the *Four Seasons Explorer* provides.



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## If the Boat Fits ...

Although the *Four Seasons Explorer* is an ideal way to discover the Maldives, there are nearly 100 resorts and as many live-aboards to choose from in this country. Here are a couple:



### Maldives Aggressor

The 115-foot, 20-passenger *Maldives Aggressor* yacht ([aggressor.com](http://aggressor.com)) offers two different weeklong itineraries. One focuses on the colorful western atolls of North Malé and South Malé, along with Vaavu and Meemu; the other itinerary targets the dive-site-littered Rasdhoo and Ari atolls, with a blue-water hammerhead site (at Rasdhoo) and two of the country's most recognizable sites, Fish Head and Maaya Thila, in North Ari Atoll.



### Ocean Dancer

Part of the world-class Dancer Fleet live-aboard group ([dancerfleet.com](http://dancerfleet.com)), the *Ocean Dancer* plans each week depending on the particular seasons and the prevailing weather conditions, so you can enjoy the best dive sites the Maldives has to offer at the best times. To ensure your safety and comfort, all diving is done from the *Ocean Dancer's* luxurious *Dhoni*, a 55-foot "self-contained" tender equipped with high-pressure air and nitrox compressors. The *Ocean Dancer* splits its year between diving and surfing, so plan your trip from November through April, when it offers the dive charters.

## Need to Know

» **Getting There** From the USA's East Coast, your best bet is to fly via Europe to Malé International Airport (MLE); from the West Coast, fly via Singapore (SIN). Once there, you'll either be transferred by speedboat to the Four Seasons at Kuda Huraa and board the *Explorer* there, or continue on via seaplane farther north to catch the boat at the Four Seasons at Landaa Giraavaru.

» **When to Go** Year-round. The southwest monsoon (mid-May through November) has more rain, but it happens to also coincide with some of the best diving.

» **Dive Conditions** Visibility is usually between 45 to 90 feet, with the water temperature a balmy 84 degrees F year-round.

» **Price Tag** A seven-night package ranges from \$4,800 to \$6,000 (depending on the season) and includes all meals, three or four dives per day, and transfers to and from the airport. Half-week cruises are also available.

» **More Info** *Four Seasons Explorer*, 800-332-3442, [fourseasons.com/maldives](http://fourseasons.com/maldives)



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### Hopkins Village

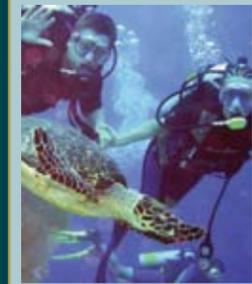


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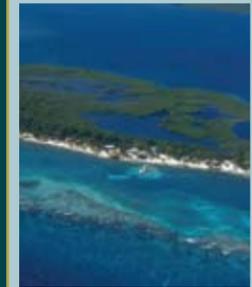
### Glover's Atoll



#### Isla Marisol Resort on Glover's Atoll

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### Turneffe Atoll



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