

NORTH & CENTRAL ATOLLS INCL. HANIFARU BAY





**North and Central Atolls
incl. Hanifaru Bay in Baa atoll**

Welcome to Hanifaru Bay, a mesmerizing natural wonder in the Maldives. This marine protected area in the Baa Atoll boasts rich biodiversity and incredible underwater spectacles. Witness the seasonal gathering of manta rays and whale sharks, known as the feeding frenzy, from May to November. Dive into crystal-clear turquoise waters and swim alongside these majestic creatures. Hanifaru Bay is also home to vibrant coral reefs, sea turtles, and diverse marine life. To preserve this sanctuary, responsible tourism practices are enforced. Immerse yourself in this underwater paradise and create unforgettable memories. Experience Hanifaru Bay's captivating beauty and awe-inspiring encounters firsthand.

Start/End Liveboard: Male/Hulhumale

2-3 dives per day / 7 to 11 nights aboard

Atolls: North Male, Baa, Raa or Lhaviyani, North Ari Atoll

For who: for all, beginner and experienced scuba diving levels, Snorkelers welcome!
Mostly Thilas, few channels possible. Snorkeling in Hanifaru Bay in Baa atoll

Exact routing depends on the weather!
We will choose the best liveboard routing!

Hanifaru Bay fee per person/visit: 25 USD (not included!)

NORTH MALE ATOLL:

Fish Tank*

Directly in front of a fish factory in the North Male Atoll, large schools of stingrays gather again and again, looking for food. Mostly you can find them on a sandy slope with rubble, so that you can watch the spectacle easy or if there is current, you can also hook there. You can also find all kinds of moray eels there. If you are lucky, a guitar shark or even a tiger or bull shark will appear.

Lankan Beyru (Manta Point) *

The outer reef of the Paradise Island resort, not far from the airport island. The main attraction of the site are manta rays coming to the cleaning station during the southwest monsoon. The divesite is relatively easy to access, with small currents and is very often considered as a good dive to start the week. The cleaning station itself is a large coral block covered with anemones and full of fish life. It is also very common to come across whitetip reef sharks, turtles and napoleons.

Bodu Hithi Thila

Located in the middle of the Kaafu Atoll, with the reef top of 8-10 meters and three bays with sandy bottom between 15-25 meters, this thila is a cleaning and feeding station for mantas from January till May. The site has a long reef with the best diving experience on the southern end and also points to a cave at 17m where nurse sharks can be spotted. The site is mostly ideal for experienced divers.

BAA ATOLL:

Hanifaru Bay

Hanifaru Bay is a sanctuary for people who love snorkeling with manta rays and whale sharks. This UNESCO biosphere reserve in the Maldives is legally designated as a Marine Protected Area. There are strict regulations in place to protect and preserve this amazing wonder. The whaleshark and Manta season is from May to December. In this period, planktons gets trapped in the funnel-like reef of Hanifaru Bay and concentration of planktons attracts whale sharks and schools of manta rays. At any time there could be

over a hundred mantas and several whalesharks feeding off the coral reef. This is the world's largest feeding station known to exist.

At Hanifaru Bay you can do snorkeling, diving is not permitted any more.

At some point whalesharks and manta population in Hanifaru Bay went to a drastic drop. The creatures might have been disturbed by human intervention. Hence, the regulations are important to keep this amazing wonder preserved.

Vaadhoo Thila

This is a medium-sized thila, located east of Dheburidhetherey Vaadhoo Island in Maldives, surrounded by coral blocks. The fauna in this site is rich and varied, with snappers, tunas, and fusiliers galore. It is also accessible to divers who have experience diving at 20-30 meters and can be explored all year round.

Dhonfan Thila

Located in the Baa Atoll, with a maximum depth of 30 meters, this site is a small submerged reef that is ranked as one of the best dive sites in the Baa Atoll. It could be a moderately difficult dive, depending on the current conditions. Divers can explore schooling fusiliers and snappers, and have the chance to experience mantas during the SouthWest monsoon. Sharks can also be seen from time to time on the top reef.

NOONU ATOLL

Orimas Thila

Located five kilometers west of Felivaru Island is a must-see for divers visiting Noonu Atoll. This dive site hosts a cleaning station for gray reef sharks and eagle rays. This site is also accessible throughout the year and is relatively deep, requiring a fast descent. Therefore, it is one of the most ideal sites for divers who are used to fast descents.

Manta Trust

Formed in 2011, the Manta Trust is a UK registered charity that co-ordinates global mobulid research and conservation efforts. Our team is comprised of a diverse group of researchers, scientists, conservationists, educators and media experts; working together to share and promote knowledge and expertise. Our mission is to conserve mobulid rays, their relatives, and their habitats, through a combination of research, education and collaboration.

The Republic of Maldives has a massive population of reef manta rays (*Mobula alfredi*) After 15 years of data collection, we estimate that the total population for this small nation in the middle of the Indian Ocean numbers around 10,000 individuals - making it the largest known population of reef manta rays in the world (by a large margin too!). The Maldivian reef mantas are year-round residents, migrating across the country's 26 atolls in tandem with the changing monsoons and the resulting shifts in zooplankton abundance and distribution. These nutrient-rich waters support huge quantities of marine life, and it's not uncommon to find several dozen manta rays feeding in the shallow surface waters in and around the atolls. At the right time of year, some key sites such as Hanifaru Bay, play host to feeding aggregations of >150 mantas - sometimes with a whale shark or two joining in on the feast.

These spectacular underwater events, coupled with the diversity of marine life across the country, makes the Maldives one of the best dive and snorkel destinations in the world. Every year the number of tourists travelling to the Maldives specifically to swim with charismatic marine megafauna has increased. These animals are therefore highly

valued as a tourism resource in the Maldives, generating an estimated USD 8.1 million annually in direct revenue for manta ray tourism alone. This type of tourism has clear significant benefits to the Maldivian economy and for the wider-scale conservation of mantas and the ocean - but as is the case with many natural resources, they continue to be stretched in this developing nation. The negative associated impacts of tourism are increasingly affecting the manta population and their habitat.