

Hanifaru Bay & Northern Atolls

Sample Itinerary: 7-night itinerary for scuba diving in Hanifaru Bay and the Northern Atolls of Maldives

Summary

This Itinerary takes you to the fantastic dive sites in the northern part of the Maldives. You will get to visit the best dive sites around the atolls of North Male, Lhaviyani, Baa, Raa, Noonu, Shaviyani and Haa Atoll. The northern atolls are a paradise for divers and they offer an exceptionally unique underwater topography with deep channels and richness of their waters, a heritage from the free flowing ocean that massively passes through this part of the country. This part of Maldives is subject to stronger storms than the rest of the country and its weather is also less predictable. A long overnight sail is also part of this itinerary.

Recommendation on Diver's Qualifications

Please note that this itinerary will involve diving in currents. We recommend that our guests have:

- A minimum of 50 logged dives
- Nitrox certification
- Experience with diving in currents

Disclaimer

We wish to show you the best diving possible; however, a number of factors determine which route the Cruise Director and Captain will choose and which dive sites we visit. Weather conditions, tides, currents and the number of other dive vessels at a particular site all play a part in where the boat is heading to. While we attempt to ensure the number of dives we have scheduled is fulfilled, bad weather can hinder the yacht's ability to reach a specific dive site in our scheduled time. The safety of all on board is paramount and we always do our best to offer diving at alternative sites, should we be unable to visit the sites listed below.

A Typical Day

The diving day has a typical schedule as follows:

- 06:00 Wake-up call
- 06:30 - 07:00 Light breakfast followed by a briefing and Dive 1
- 08:30 Full breakfast , relaxation period
- 10:30 Briefing and Dive 2
- 12:30 Lunch, relaxation period
- 14:30 Briefing and Dive 3
- 16:00 Snack, relaxation period
- 19:00 Dinner

The following is a description of some of the dive sites we may visit during your liveaboard safari on board M/Y White Pearl.

Day 1 - 3

Haa Dhaalu Atoll: Heaven & Hell

Located approximately 320 km north of Malé, Haa Dhaalu Atoll is an administrative district spread over 38 islands, of which 14 are inhabited. The atoll is officially known as South Thiladhunmathi Atoll in the Maldives, and contains two airports – a domestic airport in Kulhudhuffushi and an international airport in Hanimaadhoo. Visitors to Haa Dhaalu are met with stunning beaches and turquoise waters, the main ingredients of a magical beach holiday in the tropics.

Experienced divers have the opportunity to venture into both the depths of Heaven and Hell. This particular dive takes place at a thila, or submerged island, which begins at a depth of 59 feet (18 metres) and boasts some of the finest corals found in the atoll. As you descend further to 90 feet (30 metres), you'll be captivated by the striking overhangs of the reef, adorned with soft corals in various shades of blue, pink, yellow, and green. It's not uncommon to spot graceful turtles and the occasional manta ray gliding overhead.

Day 3 - 4

Shaviyani Atoll: Lupo Thila

Get ready to dive into an aquatic adventure like no other in the mesmerising Shaviyani Atoll! The **Lupo Thila**, a small yet vibrant reef, has something for divers of all levels. Here, you'll swim amongst schools of lively batfish, jacks, and barracuda, while also encountering silvertip sharks, grey reef sharks, and white tip sharks. And, if you're lucky, you may even catch a glimpse of the elusive guitar fish! The underwater world of Lupo Thila starts at a shallow 5 metres and plunges down to a mesmerising 30 metres and beyond.

Day 4 - 5

Noonu Atoll: Orimas Thila and Miyaru Thila

Diving in the North part of the Maldives the underwater life is the most pristine and untouched. Here you will be able to see many species of fish including colorful schools of reef fish such as parrotfish, butterfly fish, lionfish and more. One of the best sites for grey shark encounters is the **Orimas Thila** dive site. There's a beautiful drop-down to 30 metres where the current will take you to a sandy channel. On the way, divers can expect to see soldierfish, eagle rays, anemones, nudibranchs, and snappers. Seeing 20 or more sharks is not uncommon here.

Leopard sharks and guitar fish, eagle rays, tuna and schools of snapper love to hang around the **Miyaru Thila** – a pinnacle in the middle of the atoll.

Some of the dive sites can be more suitable for experienced divers because especially in the rainy season waters can get choppy and currents mildly strong.

Day 6 - 7

Raa Atoll and Lhaviyani Atoll: Kuredu Express and Shipyard

Lhaviyani Atoll offers some of the most diverse and accessible diving in the country. Dive sites range from mild to wild, with exciting underwater attractions including shipwrecks and seasonal encounters with sharks and manta rays. This atoll's northern waters are home to sites like **Kuredu Express** - known for fast moving currents, plummeting channels, and encounters with pelagic species like sharks and manta rays. Plus, the **Shipyard's** two famous wrecks, one of which can even be explored by beginners. You'll also visit thilas - submerged pinnacles that serve as busy cleaning stations for marine megafauna. Here, some of the region's largest species wait patiently in line for their spa sessions with tiny reef fish who are more than happy to offer their services.

Day 8 - 9

Baa Atoll: Maavaru Kanduu and Dhonfanu Thila

Back-rolling into the invitingly warm water of **Maavaru Kanduu**, you will sink down initially to the top of the reef at around 8 to 9 metres where ideally you will encounter a gentle current. As with many of the dive sites in Maldives, there are plateaus and overhangs cutting into the side of the reef, but this site promises something exceptional. Every inch of the overhangs which face downward are covered in a rainbow of soft corals illuminating the reef in pastel shades of predominantly blue and yellow but also green and mustard. The sight is one of delicate beauty with the delightful colours seeming to glow brightly against the dull shade of the rocky substrate. Fish life includes midnight snapper, small-toothed emperor, coral rock cod, moon fusiliers and broad-striped fusiliers, while the shallows play host to thousands of orange basslets as well as moon wrasse and lizardfish.

Dhonfanu Thila consists of a pinnacle which comes to a point and faces into the prevailing current. The current splits at the point and runs down either flank of the reef so you will normally drop in advance of reaching the thila so that as you descend and allow the current to bring you to the point of the reef at about 22 metres. Look for manta rays here. Baa Atoll is well known for them and this is one site where they are seen regularly. Overhangs provide shelter for yellow-lined snapper and soldierfish in big numbers. Often there are a lot of cleaning wrasses around so expect to see plenty of skin treatments being administered. The site is also home to an unbelievable number of fish: red toothed triggers, black pyramid butterflyfish, parrotfish, angelfish, long nosed butterflyfish, unicornfish and starry rabbitfish among hundreds of species.

Hanifaru Bay

Hanifaru Bay is the site of one of the most spectacular congregations of manta rays in the Maldives - if not the world. After catching the attention of the diving world in the 1990s, the bay and its manta rays and whale sharks are now part of a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve.

What makes Hanifaru Bay so special?

Located on the southeastern side of Baa Atoll, Hanifaru Bay overlooks a deep-water channel that separates the island from neighbouring Dharavandoo. The bay's reef is twice as wide at the mouth as it is towards the lagoon, forming a distinctive keyhole-like shape. This unique structure acts like a giant funnel, driving high concentrations of plankton deeper into the bay and closer to the surface - creating the perfect conditions for a bonafide filter-feeding frenzy. This high concentration of plankton is the reason why the manta rays gather here in such huge numbers - the more food there is, the more mantas join in the feeding! Individual

manta rays barrel-roll through particularly dense patches of food, but will also join up and form manta trains - spiralling 'cyclones' of rays feeding in formation. It is this extraordinary behaviour that has made Hanifaru Bay so famous.

Day 10 - 12

North Male Atoll: HP Reef and Nassimo Thila

North Malé Atoll's diving is perhaps the best known and most explored within the Maldives, making it a great destination for those seeking reliable world-class experiences. The atoll is known for its healthy reefs, underwater caves, drop offs and abundant soft and hard coral, as well as encounters with large pelagics such as sharks and manta rays. At **HP Reef** and **Nassimo Thila**, divers will be blown away by the seemingly endless soft coral fields inhabited by large schools of bright coloured Anthias. **HP Reef** is a stunning dive site. It is also called Rainbow Reef, due to the variety of colours. The reef leads to a channel with multiple rock formations, blocks, boulders, ledges, rifts, and a cave. Strong currents provide food for schools of fish hanging around in a swim-through that leads to the top of a cave and is frequently called "the chimney". All of the underwater structures are rich in various corals and other underwater plants, divers can examine. The demanding dive at **Nassimo Thila** follows the north side of a fine thila, also known as Paradise Rock, which has superb gorgonians and sea fans on coral blocks, cliffs and overhangs. Numerous large fish can be seen on this dive site.