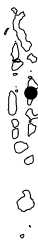


Male'



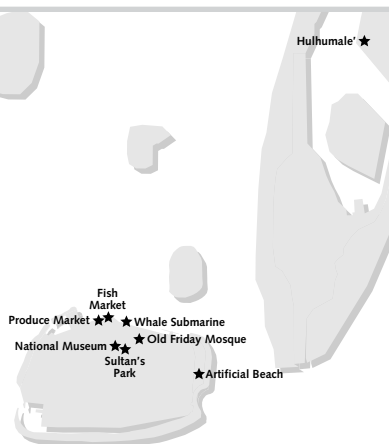
A tiny island, densely crowded with motorbikes, bustling business people, stern-faced policemen, hawkers and crisply uniformed school children, Male' (*mar-lay*) is the modern, mercantile face of the Maldives that few people take the time to see. Overlooked by brightly coloured tall thin buildings and surrounded by incongruously turquoise water all around, this is the centre of the Maldives, the engine driving its economic progress and the forum for the country's (stified) political debate.

Far smaller than the neighbouring airport island of Hulhumale' – where long-haul flights land on a runway that dwarfs the main avenues of the capital – Male' nevertheless feels like an important place, where the economic, political and cultural leaders of the republic congregate, where nearly all the country's massive number of exports arrive and where more than a few expats and travellers find themselves from time to time. That said, Male' is interesting to visit mainly for a taste of Maldivian life more than for its inherent wealth of things to see and do. Independent travellers (or FITs as they are known locally) will find that this is a place they see a lot of – it's also one of the few places where palm trees and sandy beaches aren't on the menu.

Male' is pleasant and pleasingly quirky – its alcohol-free bars and restaurants jostle with its incredible array of shops and lively markets (imagine that in this tiny space all imports into the country are administered and sold) and the general hubbub of a capital is very much present. This is a chance to get a real feel for the Maldives, what makes its people tick and to meet Maldivians on an equal footing.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get a taste of everyday Maldivian life at the fish and produce **markets** (p95)
- See the interesting collection in the **National Museum** (p93) and enjoy the shade in **Sultan's Park** (p93)
- Admire and explore the fascinating coral stone **Old Friday Mosque** (p95)
- If you're not a diver, see a reef up close and personal on the **Whale Submarine** (p95)
- Check out the fascinating tetrapods and the quirky tetrapod monument on the southern side of the island at **Artificial Beach** (p96)
- Take a ferry trip to **Hulhumale'** (p104) and see the Maldivian Brave New World under construction



■ AREA: 1.77 SQ KM

■ ELEVATION: 2M

■ POPULATION: 80,000

HISTORY

Male' has been the seat of the Maldives' ruling dynasties since before the 12th century, though none left any grand palaces. Some trading houses appeared in the 17th century, along with a ring of defensive bastions, but Male' did not acquire the trappings of a city and had a very limited range of economic and cultural activities. Visitors in the 1920s estimated the population at only 5000.

Growth began with the 1930s modernisation, and the first banks, hospitals, high schools and government offices appeared in the following decades. Only since the 1970s, with wealth from tourism and an expanding economy, has the city really burgeoned and growth emerged as a problem.

But a problem it has very definitely become; despite extending the area of the city through land reclamation over the island's reef, Male' is unable to extend any further and so the government is looking to projects such as nearby Hulhumale' to accommodate the future overspill of the city.

ORIENTATION

Male' is a roughly rectangular shape, its centre being spread out along the north side of the island – where all the main jetties and harbours are. The main street is the waterfront Boduthakurufaanu Magu, which now goes all the way around the island. Many central government institutions are on this street and it opens up half-way down to include the city's main square, Jumhooree Maidan. Male' is divided into four administrative districts, from west to east: Maafannu, covering most of the western end of the island; Machangolhi, running north-south across the middle; Galolhu, a crowded residential maze in south-central Male'; and Henveiru, covering the east and northeast. These districts are indiscernible to visitors, but taxi drivers understand the addresses. Street numbers are rarely used – the building name will do.

Maps

Given Male's size the two maps in this book should be sufficient. The Maldives Tourism Promotion Board's *Resort/Hotel Guide* brochure has an adequate map of Male'; it's given out free at the airport and at the MTPB office (p91) in town. There are town plans pointing out the major sights of the island along Boduthakurufaanu Magu.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Asrafee Bookshop (Map p94; ☎ 3323424; Chandanee Magu) Has a good selection of English paperbacks upstairs.

Asters Bookshop (Map p94; ☎ 3335505; www.asters.com.mv; Majeedee Magu) Has one of the best selections of English-language books in town, including Lonely Planet guides, a good history section and more highbrow fiction than the usual offerings.

Novelty Bookshop (Map p94; ☎ 3318899; Fareedhee Magu) This outlet for Novelty Publishing, the country's main publisher, has a great range of books about the Maldives, as well as some imported titles.

Emergency

Ambulance ☎ 102

Fire ☎ 118

Police ☎ 119

Police station (Boduthakurufaanu Magu) On the corner of Jumhooree Maidan.

Internet Access

There is no shortage of Internet cafés in Male'. You will see plenty throughout the town, but the following are the best located.

Bistro Jade (Map p94; Boduthakurufaanu Magu;

☎ 8am-11pm Sat-Thu, 3-11pm Fri) A hub for expats, this great café is a wi-fi hotspot so if you have your own laptop come here for a fast connection and good coffee.

Cyber Café (Map p94; Ameer Ahmed Magu; per hr Rf15;

☎ 9am-midnight Sat-Thu, 2pm-midnight Fri) Connections can be slow here, but the booths offer privacy.

Dhiraagu Cyber Café (Map p94; Chandanee Magu;

☎ 9am-1am Sat-Thu, 4pm-1am Fri & religious holidays) Dhiraagu, the country's main mobile-phone provider, has free wi-fi in this, their central outlet. Assuming you have a laptop you can come in and go online for free.

Laundry

Any hotel will take care of your laundry for a few dollars per item. Guesthouses will do it more cheaply. Allow a couple of days if the weather is rainy. There are no laundromats, and only a couple of dedicated laundry services.

Baansaree Laundry (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3327134; shirts & shorts Rf4; ☎ closed Fri) It's out of the way, a few blocks northeast of the New Harbour, but is reliable and extremely cheap.

Left Luggage

There are no dedicated left-luggage facilities in Male' itself. The only option is taking a day room at a hotel, or asking nicely at reception if you can leave your bags. There is

a left-luggage service at the airport that costs US\$3 per item, per 24 hours.

Libraries

National Library (Map p94; Majeedee Magu; ☎ closed Fri) In a big, newly renovated building, and has quite a few English books. Nonresidents can't borrow books, but are welcome to sit and read in the library.

Medical Services

Both the following will make arrangements with travel insurance companies, and both have doctors trained to do a diving medical check.

ADK Private Hospital (Map p94; ☎ 3313553; Sosun Magu) Private facility with Western-trained doctors and dentists, excellent standards of care, and quite high prices.

Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3316647; Buruzu Magu) Modern public facility, well equipped and staffed with English-speaking doctors.

Money

For reliable service, try the State Bank of India, Bank of Maldives, Bank of Ceylon or HSBC Bank, all near each other on Bodu-

thakurufaanu Magu (Map p94). All have ATMs that accept international cards.

More local banks are clustered near the harbour end of Chandanee Magu and east along Boduthakurufaanu Magu. They all change travellers cheques, usually for a small transaction fee. Bank of Maldives doesn't charge a fee if you change travellers cheques for Maldivian rufiya, but does charge if you want US dollars.

Universal Enterprises Ltd (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3322971; www.unisurf.com; 39 Orchid Magu) The Amex agent in the Maldives.

Post

Main post office (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3315555; www.maldivespost.com; Boduthakurufaanu Magu; ☎ 8.15am-9pm Sun-Thu, 3-9pm Fri, 9.15am-9pm Sat) Brand new and efficiently run, just opposite the Maldives Port Authority building. Go to the 1st floor to post a parcel. There's a post office at the airport too.

Telephone & Fax

Although they seem to go largely unused, there are Dhiraagu telephone booths around the town. Lots of shops offer discounted calls abroad and phone cards. Anyone in the Maldives for long might profit from getting a local SIM card for their mobile phone (see p180).

Toilets

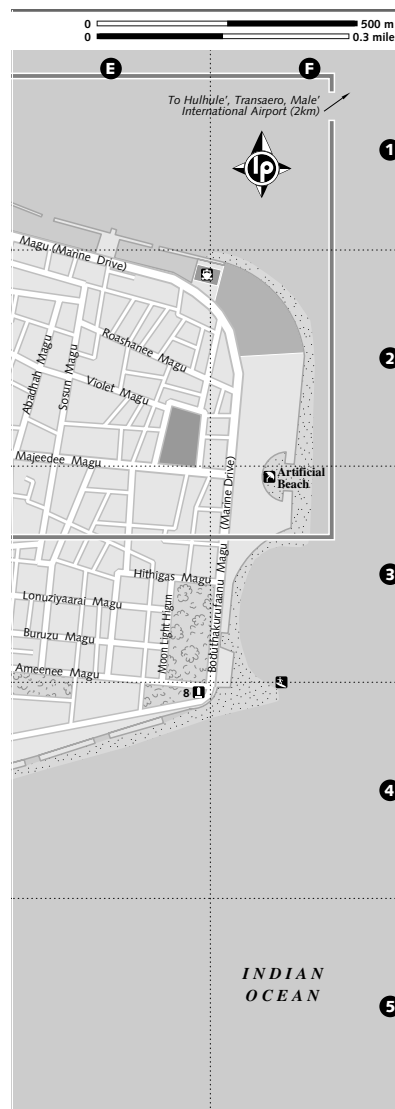
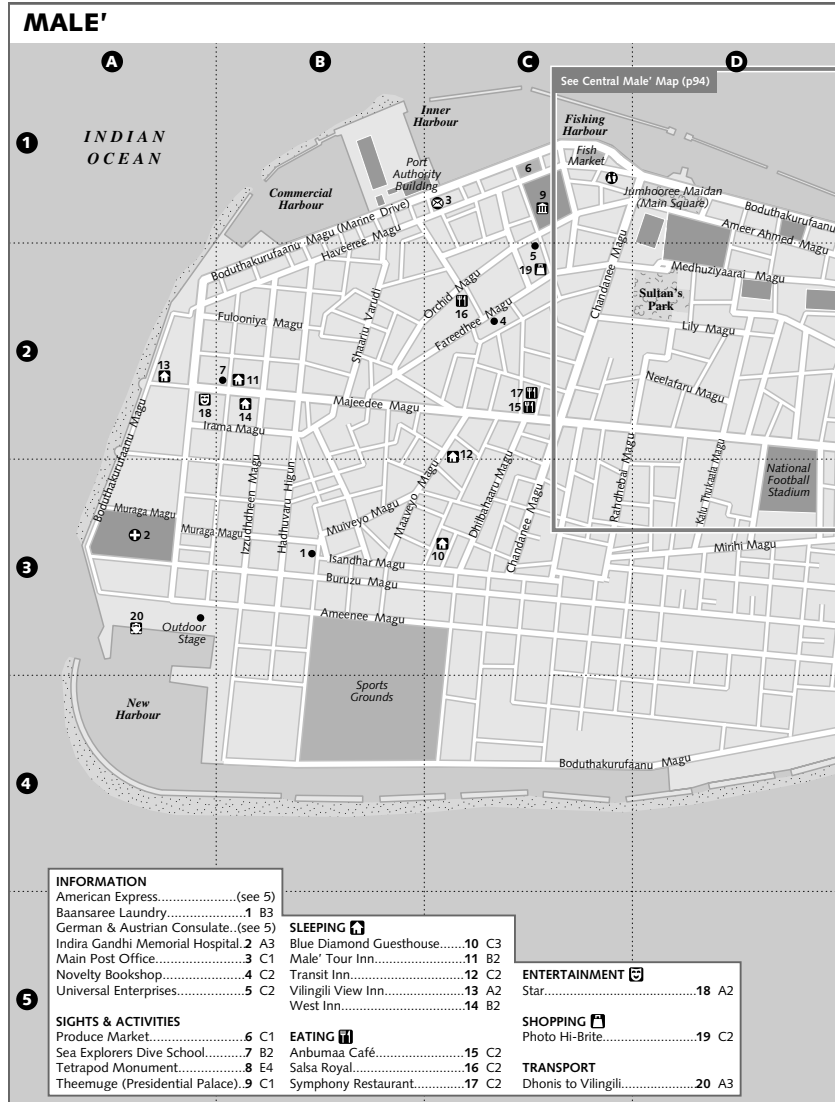
The most conveniently located public toilet (RF2) is on the back street between Jade Bistro and the small Mosque on Ameer Ahmed Magu. However, you're equally able to pop in and use the toilets of most cafés or restaurants; the owners are almost universally polite and don't seem to mind.

Tourist Information

Metropolitan Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB; Map p94; ☎ 3323228; www.visitmaldives.com; 12 Boduthakurufaanu Magu; ☎ 7.30am-2.30pm Sun-Thu) The MTPB has an information counter on the 3rd floor of an office building on the seafront. It gives away free booklets and maps and can answer specific inquiries. The information desk at the airport is supposedly open when international flights arrive, but sometimes this isn't the case. Even when it's not staffed, look on the shelf out the front for some useful booklets.

Travel Agencies

There's a plethora of travel agents in Male'. Most of the smaller ones do nothing but try to sell an allocation of rooms at a resort



or two. If you're an independent traveller looking for a resort or a safari tour, see p14, and be prepared to do some shopping around – ask in town, or call one or more of those listed below. A full list of Male' travel agents can be found at www.visitmaldives.com.

Crown Tours (Map p94; ☎ 3329889; www.crowntours.maldives.com; Fasmeeur Bldg, 5th fl, Boduthakurufaanu Magu)

Inner Maldives (Map p94; ☎ 3315499; www.innermaldives.com.mv; Ameer Ahmed Magu)

Sultans of the Sea (Map p94; ☎ 3320330; www.sultansoftheseas.com; Fasmeeur Bldg, ground fl, Boduthakurufaanu Magu)

Sun Travel & Tours (Map p94; ☎ 3325977; www.sunholidays.com; Meheli Goalhi)

Sunland Travel (Map p94; ☎ 3324658; www.sunland.com.mv; ST0 Trade Centre, Orchid Magu)

Sunny Maldives (Map p94; ☎ 3338527; www.sunnymaldives.com; Ameer Ahmed Magu)

Villa Travels (Map p94; ☎ 3332555; www.villatravels.com; 1/12 Boduthakurufaanu Magu)

Voyages Maldives (Map pp90–1; ☎ 3323617; www.voyagesmaldives.com; Chandhanee Magu)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The main danger in Male' is posed by the mopeds that seem to appear from nowhere at great speeds. Keep your wits about you and look around before crossing the road. Crime against travellers is not unknown, but it is quite rare. Pickpocketing is probably the biggest threat, particularly in crowded shopping areas and around the markets; but again, it is not common. The

main annoyance in Male' is the lack of alcohol. If you really want a drink, take the ferry from Jetty No 1 to the Hulhule' Island Hotel (p100) near the airport.

SIGHTS

Male' is more of an experience than a succession of astonishing must-sees. The best thing to do is enjoy a stroll and absorb the atmosphere of this oddest of capitals. That said, there are a few genuine sights well worth a day's exploration.

Old Friday Mosque

Hukuru Miskiyy (Map p94; Medhuziyaarai Magu) is the oldest mosque in the country, dating from 1656. It's a beautiful structure made from coral stone into which intricate decoration and Quranic script have been carved. Even though an ugly corrugated-iron cover is protecting the roof and some of the walls, this is still a fascinating place. The interior is superb and famed for its fine lacquer work and elaborate woodcarvings. One long panel, carved in the 13th century, commemorates the introduction of Islam to the Maldives. Visitors wishing to see inside are supposed to get permission from an official of the **Ministry of Islamic Affairs** (☎ 3322266). However, most of the staff are officials of the ministry and, if you are respectful and well dressed, they will usually give you permission to enter the mosque on the spot – just hang around outside and try to get the attention of someone, although don't bother if you're underdressed.

MALE' IN ONE DAY

Take a stroll down Boduthakurufaanu Magu, the main street running along the waterfront, and enjoy a relaxed breakfast at **Bistro Jade** (p89). Carry on down the waterfront, see the President's Office and the main square, turning left to visit the **Grand Friday Mosque** (opposite), if you're dressed respectfully enough. Next door, drop in to see the small but interesting collection at the **National Museum** (opposite) and enjoy the lovely gardens of the **Sultan's Park** (opposite) before some shopping around Fareedhee Magu. For lunch the open-air **Seagull Cafe** (p101) or **Salsa Café** (p101) are great options, after which you can explore the **market** (p95), where you'll see the morning catch being brought in and gutted (you'll be glad you ate beforehand) and everything else imaginable on sale. Carry on to the president's jetty where you can take the boat to the **Whale Submarine** (p95) for a fascinating trip to the reef nearby, and if you still have some energy head over to the artificial beach on the east of the island where you can cool off, or just chill out with the locals after work and watch the impromptu soccer matches. As night falls, the city comes alive with promenading couples and teenagers clogging the streets on their mopeds. Round the day off with a delicious meal at **Thai Wok** (p101) and join the crowds walking along the seafront – the closest Male' has to a nightlife scene.

HOUSE NAMES

Street numbers are rarely used in Male', so most houses and buildings have a distinctive name, typically written in picturesque English as well as in the local Thaana script. Some Maldivians prefer rustic titles like Crabtree, Forest, Oasis View and Banana Cabin. Others are specifically floral, like Sweet Rose and Luxury Garden, or even vegetable, like Carrot, or the perplexing Leaf Mess. There are also exotic names like Paris Villa and River Nile, while some sound like toilet disinfectants – Ozone, Green Zest, Dawn Fresh.

Some of our quirkier favourite house names include Hot Lips, Subtle Laughter, Remind House, Pardon Villa, Frenzy and Mary Lightning and Aston Villa.

Shop names and businesses, on the other hand, often have an overt advertising message – People's Choice Supermarket, Bless Trade, Fair Price, and Neat Store. Premier Chambers is not a pretentious house name – it's where you'll find Male's first barrister.

The mosque was built on the foundations of an old temple that faced west to the setting sun, not northwest towards Mecca. Consequently, the worshippers have to face the corner of the mosque when they pray – the striped carpet, laid at an angle, shows the correct direction.

Overlooking the mosque is the solid, round, blue-and-white tower of the *munnaaru* – the squat minaret. Though it doesn't look that old, it dates from 1675. West of the mosque is a graveyard, with many elaborately carved tombstones. Stones with rounded tops are for females, those with pointy tops are for males and those featuring gold-plated lettering are the graves of former sultans. The small buildings are family mausoleums and their stone walls are intricately carved. Respectably dressed non-Muslims are welcome to walk around the graveyard; you don't require permission for this.

National Museum & Sultan's Park

The small **National Museum** (Map p94; ☎ 3322254; Medhuziyaarai Magu; adult/child under 12 US\$3/1; ☎ 8am–6pm Sun–Thu, closed Fri & holidays) is well worth a visit. Housed in a small, three-storey building in one corner of the Sultan's Park, it is the only remaining part of the original sultan's palace – the rest was demolished in 1968 at the beginning of the second republic.

The museum has a small collection that is displayed over three floors and well labelled in English. You'll be accompanied throughout by one of the staff. A useful, illustrated guide to the museum, sold at the entrance for Rf50, has colour pictures and more detailed descriptions of the exhibits. Many of the exhibits are things once owned

by the sultans – clothing, utensils, weapons and a throne. Some of the fabrics are beautiful, especially the rich brocades. Excellent, traditional lacquer work is displayed on large bowls and trays used to bring gifts to the sultan. Weapons include *bonthi* sticks, which were used in martial arts, and a *silvan bonthi*, used by a husband to punish an unfaithful wife.

Especially interesting are the museum's pre-Islamic stone carvings collected by Thor Heyerdahl, and other examples from sites all over the country. They include a fine Buddha's head and various phallic images. Most of them are labelled, but little is really known about the significance or historical context of these fascinating finds. Quirky additions to the historic collection include a tiny Maldivian flag taken on one of the Apollo missions and some moon rock, both gifts from Richard Nixon.

The **park** (☎ 8am–6pm Sun–Thu, 4–6pm Fri) surrounding the museum was once part of the grounds of the sultan's palace. It's a beautifully planted park full of flowers and trees and one of the best public spaces in Male'.

Grand Friday Mosque & Islamic Centre

The golden dome of this impressive **mosque** (Map p94) dominates the skyline of Male' and has become something of a symbol for the city. Set back off the main square, Jumhooree Maidan, and opposite the sinister National Security Service Headquarters, this is the biggest mosque in the country.

Opened in 1984, and built with help from the Gulf States, Pakistan, Brunei and Malaysia, the Grand Friday Mosque is striking in its plainness, built in white

described as a sight of Male', but it's a popular excursion and departs from a submarine dock just off the western side of Male'. First things first, this is not a submarine for whale watching – its name is slightly misleading. It is, in fact, a submarine for looking at life on a reef. It's hard to recommend for divers, as the trip can't really compare to a real dive, but for kids and those who don't dive, this is a great (if pricey) little excursion. As the submarine departs from off the coast you have to get a boat either from the airport of Jetty No 1 (the jetty in front of Jumhooree Maidan, also known as the President's Jetty) – one boat picks up from both about 30 minutes before the scheduled departure of the submarine. You should ring ahead and book a place (there are several departures daily) so the boat can pick you up. At the submarine dock (the 'Whale House') you pay your money, have a cool drink and board the sub.

The sub takes a few minutes to get to its dive spot, and then descends to about 35m while passengers gaze out through large, lenslike windows. A variety of fish come very close to the windows, attracted partly by the food that the sub dispenses – surgeonfish, blue-striped snapper, and unicornfish are among the most commonly seen, but you have an excellent view of smaller creatures too, such as lionfish and anemonefish. The sub goes very close

to a reef wall, and its lights illuminate crevices and show up colours that wouldn't be visible in natural light.

Underwater time is about 45 minutes, but allow 1½ hours for the whole trip. Quite a few people fit in a submarine trip if they have a few hours to spare at the airport before their departure flight. The sub maintains normal surface pressure inside, so it's quite safe to fly straight afterwards.

Artificial Beach

The western seafront of Male' is its recreational centre. Here, a sweet little beach has been crafted from the breakwater tetrapods and there's a whole range of fast food cafés next to it as well as open fields for ad hoc games of soccer and cricket. Further up towards the airport ferry there are fairground attractions at the **Majeediyya Carnival** (Map p94) including a bowling alley and more eateries. The other way you'll see the charming **tetrapod monument** (Map pp90–1), a local salute to the mini concrete structures that together form a life-saving breakwater for the city (see below).

WALKING TOUR

Male' is best seen on foot – you can circumnavigate the entire island in a couple of hours; but to get a proper feel for the place, try to get into the crowded, chaotic backstreets in the island's centre.

THE MAGNIFICENT TETRAPOD

The installation of tetrapod walls around much of Male' saved it from the huge potential devastation of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Tetrapods are concrete blocks with four fat legs, each approximately 1m long, sticking out like the four corners of a tetrahedron. These blocks can be stacked together in rows and layers so they interlock together to form a wall several metres high, looking like a giant version of a child's construction toy. A tetrapod breakwater has gaps that allow sea water to pass through, but collectively the structure is so massive and its surface so irregular that it absorbs and dissipates the force of the waves and protects the shoreline from the physical impact of a storm. As Male' has expanded through land reclamation to cover its entire natural coral reef, its natural buffer from the force of strong waves has disappeared.

A severe storm in 1988 flooded Male's streets, but the worst damage was on the southern and eastern edges of the island. Huge waves broke up tons of landfill that was part of a land-reclamation scheme, and much of this land was re-reclaimed by the sea.

The solution was to protect the whole island with a rim of tetrapod breakwaters, constructed as part of a Japanese foreign-aid project. In some places the tetrapod walls are used to retain landfill, and have a path on top forming an attractive seaside promenade. In other places, tetrapod walls enclose an artificial harbour that provides a sheltered anchorage for small boats, and a safe spot for kids to swim.

Start from the waterfront near **Jumhooree Maidan (1)**, the main square, conspicuous for the huge Maldivian flag flying on its eastern side. It seems a pleasant and relaxed place, with friends and families relaxing around the square, but this was the setting for previously unthinkable antigovernment demonstrations in August 2004, and you'll notice that it remains a well-guarded place, with the police station on one side and the sinister white **National Security Services Headquarters (2)** to the south, strewn with orders not to take photographs.

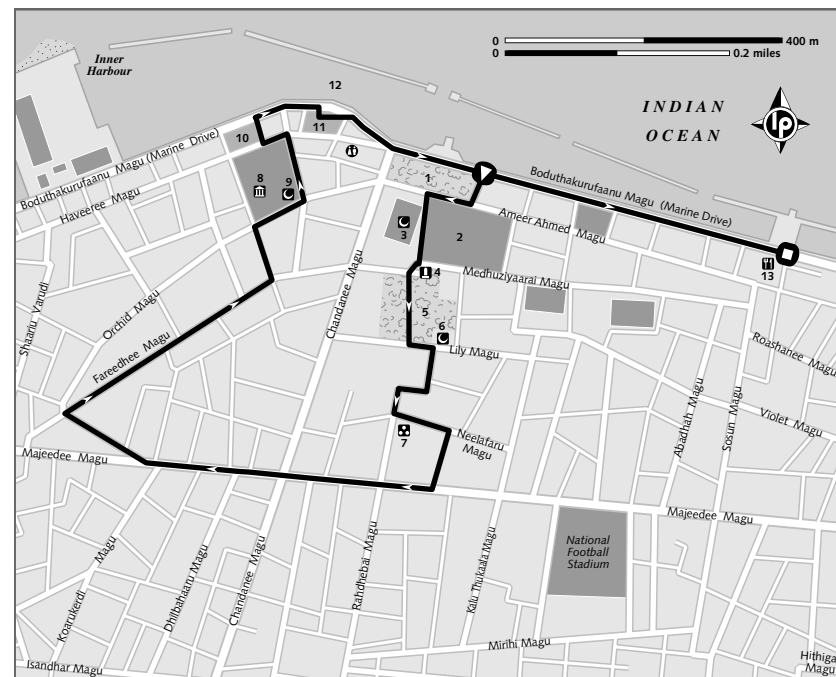
To the right of the NSS is the **Grand Friday Mosque (3; p93)**, walk down the sandy street past its main entrance and you'll arrive at the **Republican Monument (4)**, a modern-style centrepiece to a roundabout unveiled in 1999 to commemorate 30 years of Maldivian independence. Avoiding the traffic, cross over to the **Sultan's Park (5; p93)** and walk through its well-laid-out flowerbeds and plantings to Lily Magu. Exit the park and turn left, where you'll see a charming coral stone **mosque (6)** in the corner of the park, typical of the intricate 17th-century

Maldivian design. Continue south from here through streets far more typical of the crowded capital until you reach the **Tomb of Mohammed Thakurufaanu (7)**, a much-loved shrine honouring the man who liberated the Maldives from the Portuguese in the 16th century. Cut down to Majeedee Magu, the city's main thoroughfare and absorb the shops, noise and bustle of the town's commercial heart as you walk west. Cut up through the good shopping streets of Fareedhee Magu and Orchid Magu, passing the striking **Theemuge** (Presidential Palace; **8**), official residence of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The charming **mosque (9)** next door is also worth a peek at from the street.

From here head north towards the seafont and turn left for the wonderful **produce**

WALK FACTS

Start Jumhooree Maidan
Finish Bistro Jade
Distance 3km
Duration One hour



market (10; p95). Continue for a few more blocks along the waterfront, a bustling area with hardware shops and hangouts for sailors and fishermen. Go back along the seafront to the **fish market (11)**, which, along with the adjacent **fishing harbour (12)**, is a must-see for anyone in Male'. Wander along the seafront, which is always fascinating as people crowd on and off boats, and you can see more and more obscure cargo being brought ashore. Finish up at **Bistro Jade (13; p89)** for a drink out of the heat.

MALE' FOR CHILDREN

The Whale Submarine (p95) will appeal to kids of all ages, while the Artificial Beach (p96) and the recreational areas nearby is also a great place for them to swim, and older kids can join in an ad hoc football or cricket game with local children. The nearby Majeediya Carnival has some fun activities for kids as well, including the Slam Bowling Alley.

SLEEPING

Space being at a premium on the overcrowded island, hotels are not cheap here, and even top-end rooms are not large by any standard. Despite that, hotel prices are so low compared to the expensive resorts that Male' remains the cheapest place in the country to stay. There's not an enormous choice and no real top end – even the more expensive hotels are not world class, and there are no international hotel groups represented.

Budget

West Inn (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3317152; Majeedee Magu; s/d with fan US\$27/35) A new place with small, clean, dark rooms, the West Inn is off a narrow balcony at the far end Majeedee Magu. Rooms have quite good bathrooms, but no other comforts. Room rates do not include breakfast.

Male' Tour Inn (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3326220; Shaheed Ali Higu; s/d US\$28/40; 📶) Small, unattractive rooms come with cleanish bathrooms. Also at the west end of the island, it's mainly used by visiting workers. Upgraded rooms including breakfast come for an extra US\$10.

Blue Diamond Guesthouse (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3326125; fax 3316404; Badifasgandu Magu; s/d with fan US\$30/40) On a small street south of Majeedee Magu, the Blue Diamond has

small, simple en-suite rooms that were undergoing renovation when we visited. Breakfast and drinking water are included in the price. It's in a residential part of town, interesting for its authentic local ambience, but not very convenient for shops, restaurants or transport. The Maldivian family management is friendly and quite efficient, and the place is popular with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) workers and various visitors on limited budgets.

Fariva Inn (Map p94; ☎ 3337611; amsha@dhivehin.net.mv; Boduthakurufaanu Magu; s/d US\$35/45; 📶) The rooms without air-con here are clean with TV, phone and a basic bathroom. All rooms come with fans and a slight smell of damp. Excellently located.

Midrange

This type of accommodation in Male' starts at around US\$50 for singles or doubles including breakfast, and offers much better standards than the budget places. Most rooms will have air-con, a phone and hot water in the bathroom, and the better ones will have a TV. You might get a discount at some of these places if you stay more than a few days.

Extra Haven Guesthouse (Map p94; ☎ 3327453; fax 3325362; s/d with fan US\$30/40, with air-con US\$40/50; 📶) In the back streets at the east end of town, Extra Haven attracts a mixed clientele of visiting workers and budget travellers. The rooms with air-con are small and nothing fancy, and the fan-cooled rooms are even smaller and plainer, but they're all clean and have bathrooms. Some have an outlook over the town. There's satellite TV in the lobby and fresh water is available.

Athama Palace Hotel (Map p94; ☎ 3313118; athamapalace@yahoo.com; Majeedee Magu; s/d US\$40/55; 📶) It's hard to imagine anything less palatial, but the rooms are surprisingly spacious and the location is perfectly fine. There is a whiff of charm created by the Maldivian art and the fish chart-strewn walls throughout.

Maagiri Lodge (Map p94; ☎ 3322576; www.maagirilodge.com.mv; Boduthakurufaanu Magu; s/d US\$46/56; 📶) This charming little place quickly grows on you. Functional rooms with an en suite and TV are perfectly OK, but it's the staff that make you feel welcome. The breakfast is one of the best in town and the excellent location makes this a great

option. At the time of research the owners were planning to expand from five to 17 rooms.

Transit Inn (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3320420; transit@dhivehin.net.mv; Maaveyo Magu; s/d/t US\$48/58/68; 📶) The Transit Inn is a pleasant, relaxed, slightly chaotic place with a friendly little coffee shop downstairs through which you enter from the street. All rooms include a fridge and TV; bathrooms are tatty but spacious. It's a well-run establishment, and quite often full.

Burunege Residence (Map p94; ☎ 3330011; www.frontline.com.mv; Hithaffinavaa Magu; s/d US\$48/60; 📶) There is a smattering of old-world charm about this place, which is hidden away on a side street not far from the Majlis. It's set around a courtyard and has a slightly colonial feel. However, the rooms are devoid of character and are completely functional, and the receptionist did not speak a word of English on our last visit. It's not far from the airport ferries, and handy to the centre of town, so you could do much worse.

Kai Lodge (Map p94; ☎ 3328742; kailodge@dhivehin.net.mv; Violet Magu; s/d/t US\$52/70/89; 📶) A few blocks inland from the airport ferry landing, the relatively atmospheric Kai Lodge has clean, comfortable rooms with bathroom, hot water, phone, satellite TV and air-con; some have a balcony. A couple of two-room apartments accommodate four people. Day rooms for transit passengers start at US\$39.

City Palace (Map p94; ☎ 3333990; citymale@dhivehin.net.mv; Filigas Higu; s/d/tr US\$60/75/100; 📶 🚶) There are some very nice touches at this midrange hotel that overlooks the football field: free Internet is available for guests and two bottles of fresh water a day suggest more than the usual thought for the guests. Rooms are basic but comfortable, and this area of town is lovely and relaxed, a short stroll from the artificial beach.

Vilingili View Inn (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3318696; villiview@dhivehin.net.mv; Majeedee Magu; standard s/d US\$65/75, deluxe US\$60/75; 📶 🚶) At the far west end of Majeedee Magu, this inn has only a couple of rooms with views over the water to Vilingili island – most have no outlook at all, but they are extremely pleasant and well designed, including some interesting split-floor rooms. It's not convenient for access to the town centre, but it has wi-fi throughout and is quirkily attractive.

Top End

Five of Male's top-end hotels are on the northeast corner of the island, handy to the airport dhonis, and a fifth one is in the middle of town – all are comfortable, but none outstanding. Note that alcohol is not served at any of the Male' hotels – for that you have to either stay at or drop by the Hulhule' Island Hotel (p100).

Central Hotel (Map p94; ☎ 3317766; www.centralmaldives.com; Rahdhebai Magu; s/d from US\$64/80; 📶) While the big pink tower of the Central Hotel is literally in the centre of the island, this is no great shakes, given that the centre of town is the northern shore. It's actually just a little too far from everything else for comfort here, and even though the management runs a free shuttle to the airport ferry jetty, this isn't a great choice. The rooms are oddly shaped and a little cramped. Avoid the balconey-less junior suites in favour of the standard rooms, all of which have balconies and some great views.

Relax Inn (Map p94; ☎ 3314531; www.relaxmaldives.com; Ameer Ahmed Magu; standard s/d from US\$68/83; 📶) No Frankie Goes to Hollywood theme here at the one-time main business hotel of Male', now somewhat eclipsed by the Mookai and the Kam. The rooms are fine but a bit tired (we heard a UN functionary complaining about his at reception) and the furniture distinctly garish, but this remains a popular choice with the NGO sector.

Kam Hotel (Map p94; ☎ 3320611; Ameer Ahmed Magu; s/d from US\$75/90; 📶) One of three high-rise top-end hotels near the Male' waterfront, the Kam has smart and comfortable rooms, a notch better than its rivals. It's well located, with helpful staff, and is very popular with businesspeople.

Nasandhura Palace Hotel (Map p94; ☎ 3323880; www.nasandhurapalace.com; Boduthakurufaanu Magu; s/d US\$82/97; 📶) This superbly located hotel, which is opposite the airport ferry jetty, has the advantage of feeling like a social hub – people pack out its popular garden restaurant, Trends, day and night, and the staff are very welcoming. The rooms are comfortable, if a little dated, and each has a minibar, a phone and a bathtub. Some of the upstairs rooms have a view of the sea (if you stand on tiptoes).

Mookai Hotel (Map p94; ☎ 3338811; mookai@dhivehin.net.mv; Meheli Goalhi; s/d US\$92/109; 📶 🚶) One of the top hotels in town, the Mookai

has a great location just seconds from the waterfront, rooms with great views on the higher floors. And, up on the roof, there is a small but effective swimming pool to cool down in. Rooms are small but clean and well furnished. Breakfast is served over at the sister Kam Hotel opposite. It's recommended.

Hulhule' Island Hotel (Map p105; ☎ 3330888; www.hih.com.mv; Hulhule' island; s & d US\$254, ste US\$400; ☺ ☑ ☒) Certainly the priciest hotel in the area, the Hulhule' Island is on the airport island, a 10-minute dhoni ride from Male'. Very convenient for air crews, business people travelling all over the Maldives and those in transit, it's a well-run business hotel with clean and spacious rooms (most of which have great sea views), and the only hotel in Male' serving alcohol, for which expats and visitors alike frequently make the pilgrimage across the lagoon. The pool is another great attraction – it's by far the nicest in Male'. Many transit passengers take a room on a 'day use' basis (until 11pm) for US\$155.

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Candies (Map p94; ☎ 3310220; candies@dhivehinet.net.mv; Dheefuram Gholhi; s/d US\$65/75; ☺ ☑) Once part of the Kam Hotel next door, this now-independent venture is a great little place – the bar is popular with locals and the swimming pool just next to reception is a great touch. Rooms are smallish but comfortable and the whole place feels much more like a big house than a hotel. Superb location and the possibility of a morning swim make this our hotel of choice in Male'.

EATING

Rather like the accommodation scene, eating in Male' is perfectly decent without being excellent, but it's blessedly less expensive than eating à la carte at most resorts. There's plenty of choice from local cuisine to various Asian cuisines, Italian and American.

Teashops

Local teashops are frequented by Maldivian men; it's not the done thing for local women to be in one, but there is no law against it. Foreign women use them some-

times, generally with a male companion, and there's no problem. Some traditional teashops have broadened the menus, installed air-conditioning and improved service – you should feel quite comfortable in these places. Teashops are a great place to meet local people, and they're very cheap. A bigger and slightly better teashop might be called a café or 'hotel'.

Teashops have their goodies displayed on a counter behind a glass screen, and customers line up and choose, cafeteria style – if you don't know what to ask for, just point. Tea costs around Rf2 and the *hedhikaa* ('short eats'; finger food snacks) from Rf1 to Rf3. You can fill yourself for under Rf10. At meal times they also serve 'long eats', such as soups, curried fish and *roshi* (unleavened bread). A good meal costs from Rf12 to Rf25.

Teashops open as early as 5am and close as late as 1am, particularly around the port area where they cater to fishermen. During Ramadan they're open till 2am or even later, but closed during the day.

Queen of the Night (Map p94; Boduthakurufaanu Magu) A very popular spot facing the waterfront near the airport ferry, the Queen has tables next to the street where men play *carrom* (a snooker-like board game) and chess until all hours. The tables in the back and upstairs are always busy with guys grabbing some *hedhikaa*.

Buruza Hotaa (Map p94; Ameer Ahmed Magu) An extremely friendly place packed with locals throughout the day. Pick from a big selection of curries and Maldivian dishes and you'll soon find yourself being befriended.

Dawn Cafe (Map p94; Haveeree Higun) One of the bigger teashops in the area, and it's around the fish market. You can get a brilliant meal here. Try it on Friday afternoon when people come in after going to the mosque.

Anbumaa Café (Map p94; Sayyidhukilegefaanu Magu) This two-floor, extremely chilled-out budget snack bar, off Majeedee Magu, will rustle up chicken and rice, fish and chips or a bowl of noodles for R20.

Cafés

Royal Garden Café (Map p94; Medhuziyarai Magu; mains from Rf40) Despite its location opposite the southern wall of the creepy NSS Headquarters, this is a fantastic little place, with

a charming garden and an air-conditioned, stylish dark-wood interior. The menu is a typical combination of Italian, Indonesian, American and Indian cuisines.

Shell Beans (Map p94; ☎ 3333686; Boduthakuru-faanu Magu; sandwiches Rf30) More a coffee bar than a restaurant, Shell Beans serves a good range of tasty pastries, sandwiches and snacks as well good coffee. The fresh bread and cakes come daily from the Bados resort bakery. This is a fixture among travellers and expats and a good place to meet them.

Seagull Cafe (Map p94; ☎ 3323792; cnr Chandanee Magu & Fareedhee Magu; mains Rf50) One of the most pleasant and popular places, the Seagull boasts a delightfully shaded outdoor eating area and a delicious American-style menu with a kicking club sandwich. There's also a rightly popular gelateria attached, serving up the city's best ice cream.

City Snacks (Map p94; ☎ 3349302; Boduthakuru-faanu Magu; sandwiches Rf25) This convivial waterfront place is a popular meeting place after work and its few tables are always busy with coffee-drinking locals and people picking up sandwiches on the go.

Salsa Café (Map p94; ☎ 3310319; Keneree Magu; mains Rf40) The Salsa is similar in style to the Seagull – it has an open-air dining area with a garden setting and cooling fans. Situated on a back street near the shopping area, it's a long-standing favourite with expats. The menu features Maldivian, Asian and European dishes, all well prepared and presented.

Restaurants

Typically restaurants in Male' have several different cuisines on offer – most popular are Thai, Indonesian, Indian, Italian and American-style grills. Nearly everything is imported, including the prawns and the lobsters, which will be the most expensive items. The customers are mostly businesspeople, young Maldivian couples, sundry expats and day-trippers from nearby resorts. Some places have a starchy ambience, with stiff tablecloths and chilly air-con, but more casual outdoor eating is becoming popular.

None of the Male' restaurants serve alcohol, but some serve nonalcoholic beer for about Rf10 to Rf20 per can. Nearly every restaurant has now acquired an espresso

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Red Zanzibar (Map p94; ☎ 3340951; Boduthakuru-faanu Magu; mains Rf60) This relative newcomer to the city's dining scene is about as hip as Male' restaurants get and it's highly recommended. The very funky two-floor open-air restaurant and bar offers great views towards the open-air beach and the opulent traditional wooden furnishings have a distinctly boutique feel to them. The menu is by far the most interesting in the city, taking in a variety of delicious devilled fish, excellent salads and sublime desserts. There's free Internet in the bar downstairs and a cool crowd there throughout the day.

machine, and you can get a good cup of coffee, a cappuccino or a café latte almost anywhere.

Thai Wok (Map p94; ☎ 3310007; Ameer Ahmed Magu; mains Rf35-50; ☺) Quite formal by local standards – bow-tied waiters fall over themselves to assist you, often outnumbering the diners – Thai Wok has some of the best food in town, serving from a huge menu of authentic Thai dishes.

Salsa Royal (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3327830; Orchid Magu; mains Rf70; ☺) Formerly the Twin Peaks Restaurant, this airy, high-ceilinged hall now serves up Italian and Thai food from two separate menus. The restaurant is non-smoking throughout, extremely clean and with good service.

Symphony (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3326277; mains Rf40-190; ☺) This long-time favourite for Male' residents has dim lighting, chilly air-con and a smart look. The menu is comprehensive and the Indian cuisine is especially good. It's off Majeedee Magu.

Trends (Map p94; ☎ 3323380; Boduthakuru-faanu Magu; mains Rf50-100) At the Nasandhura Palace Hotel, Trends is an outdoor restaurant offering a varied menu of European, Indonesian, Thai, Chinese and Indian dishes. There's a huge choice and an equal variability in standards – we had a delicious Chinese meal here and an almost inedible sandwich here on two different occasions. However, it's always busy and the garden is charming.

Olive Garden (Map p94; ☎ 3312231; Fareedhee Magu; mains Rf40-90; ☺) This is a mainly

Italian restaurant serving pasta and extremely mediocre pizzas in a room with Arctic air-con. Nothing special at all, but it remains popular with locals.

Self-Catering

The nearest supermarket to the airport ferry jetty is the **KPS Mart** (Map p94; Ameer Ahmed Magu), which has all the essentials of life on sale. Better choice can be had at the city's biggest supermarket in the **STO Trade Centre** (Map p94; Orchid Magu), which includes fresh fruit and veg. These stores are handy for self-catering, which is a sensible option during Ramadan.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nobody comes to a dry town for night-life, let's face it, but despite the worrying sobriety of the Male' populace, there's a surprising amount going on in the evenings. Dusk is the coolest time of day, and Male' is popular with strolling couples and groups of friends who promenade along the seafront and Majeedee Magu until late in the evening. Thursday and Friday nights are the busiest, after prayers at sundown. There are even sporadic club nights put on, although there's nothing regular. Keep your eye out for notices along the seafront, as such events are always advertised.

The non air-con **Olympus** (Map p94; Majeedee Magu), opposite the stadium, shows Maldivian and Indian films as well as the occasional Hollywood blockbuster. The city's other cinema, **Star** (Map pp90-1; Majeedee Magu), was closed at the time of research and it was unclear whether it would be reopening soon or not.

The **National Stadium** (Map p94; Majeedee Magu) hosts the biggest football matches (tickets cost Rf15 to Rf30) and the occasional cricket match. More casual games can be seen any evening in the sports grounds at the east end of the island and near New Harbour.

SHOPPING

Most of the shops selling imported and locally made souvenirs are on and around Chandanee Magu, Fareedhee Magu and Orchid Magu. Many of the tourist shops have a very similar range of stock, but it's worth browsing in several if you're looking for something special.

The most popular purchases are T-shirts, sarongs, cotton clothing, postcards, picture books, small handicraft items (carved fish, lacquer boxes, coconut-shell spoons), and trinkets from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Indonesia. Prices are negotiable; they are generally cheaper in Male' than in resorts, but more expensive than on village islands.

Male' is definitely the best place to shop for more unusual antiques and Maldivian craft items – come here to look for old, wooden measuring cups, coconut graters, ceremonial knives, and finely woven grass mats. **Antique & Style** (Map p94) and **Gloria Maris** (Map p94), both upstairs on the east side of Chandanee Magu, are worth visiting. For less conventional souvenirs, such as giant fish-hooks, boat balers, hookahs (water pipes) and medicinal herbs, have a look in the local hardware, chandlery and general stores along the waterfront west of the fish market and down Fareedhee Magu.

The best range of surfboards, accessories and surf wear is available at **Atoll Surf** (Map p94; ☎ 3334555; Boduthakurufaanu Magu). Two of the best diving shops are next door to each other: **Dive Shop** (Map p94; Chandanee Magu) and **Water World** (Map p94; Chandanee Magu). Both supply a full range of equipment and are authorised dealers for big-name brands.

Several photographic shops stock quality film – **Photo Hi-Brite** (Map pp90-1; Fareedhee Magu) for Kodak products, **Villa Photo** (Map p94; STO Trade Centre, Orchid Magu) for Agfa, and **FDI Station** (Map p94; Fareedhee Magu) stocks Fuji.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

All international flights to the Maldives use **Male' International Airport** (www.airports.com.mv), which is on a separate island, Hulhule', about 2km east of Male' island. Domestic flights and seaplane transfers to resorts also use Hulhule'. Male' is linked by daily scheduled flights to Colombo, Qatar, Dubai and Trivandrum and less frequently with Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Vienna and Moscow. Charter flights connect Male' several times a week with many western European capitals.

Boat

The airport functions as the biggest transport hub in the country, so if you want to travel to a resort from Male', take the

airport ferry and get a transfer to whichever resort you want to visit. You'll need to book the transfer in advance and pay for it at the resort. Dhonis to/from the airport dock at the east end of Boduthakurufaanu Magu. This is also the best place to charter a dhoni for a day trip. Boats to Hulhumale', which is the overspill island for the capital and located on the other side of the airport island, depart from the brand-new ferry terminal east of the airport ferry dock.

Dhonis to nearby Viligili use the New Harbour on the southwest corner of Male'.

Safari boats and private yachts usually moor between Male' island and Viligili, or in the lagoon west of Hulhumale'. Safari-boat operators will normally pick up new passengers from the airport or Male', and ferry them directly to the boat.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Dhonis shuttle between the airport and Male' all day and most of the night, departing promptly every 15 minutes. At the airport, dhonis leave from the jetties just north of the arrivals hall. In Male' they arrive and depart from the landing at the east end of Boduthakurufaanu Magu. The crossing costs Rf10 per person or US\$1 if you don't have any local cash.

Bicycle

A bicycle is a good way to get around, but there's no place to rent one. Your guest-house might be able to arrange something. Be sure to lock it up and always use a light at night.

Taxi

The numerous taxis offer a few minutes of cool, air-conditioned comfort and a driver who can usually find any address in Male'. Many streets are one way and others may be blocked by construction work or stationary vehicles, so taxis will often take roundabout routes.

Fares are the same (Rf15) for any distance. Taxis may charge Rf5 extra for luggage, and they cost Rf20 after midnight. You don't have to tip. There are quite a few taxi companies, but don't worry about the name of the company – just call one of the following numbers: ☎ 3323132, ☎ 3325757 or ☎ 3322454.

AROUND MALE'

DIVING SITES

While the waters around Male' are said to be thick with rubbish and wrecked bicycles, there is some excellent diving within a short boat ride. The **Sea Explorers Dive School** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 3316172; www.seamaldives.com.mv; Bodufun-gadhu Magu) is a very well-regarded operation that does dive courses and trips for locals and the expat community. It costs US\$40 per dive including all equipment and boat trip. If you do nine dives, the 10th dive is free. A PADI open-water course is US\$410, and includes dives, equipment and certification.

Some of the best dives are along the edges of Vaadhoo Kandu (the channel between North and South Male' Atolls), which has two Protected Marine Areas. There is also a well-known wreck.

Hans Hass Place (also called Kikki Reef) is a demanding wall dive beside Vaadhoo Kandu in a Protected Marine Area. There is a lot to see at 4m or 5m, so it is good for snorkellers and less-experienced divers when the current is not too strong. There's a wide variety of marine life, including many tiny reef fish and larger species in the channel. Further down are caves and overhangs with sea fans and other soft corals.

Lion's Head is a Protected Marine Area that was once a popular place for shark feeding, and though this practice is now strongly discouraged, grey reef sharks and the occasional turtle are still common here. The reef edge is thick with fish, sponges and soft corals; although it drops steeply, with numerous overhangs, to over 40m, there is still much to see at snorkelling depth.

The wreck of the **Maldivian Victory** is an impressive and challenging dive because of the potential for strong currents. This cargo ship hit a reef and sank on Friday 13 February 1981 and now sits with the wheelhouse at around 15m, and the propeller at 35m. The ship has been stripped of anything movable, but the structure is almost intact and provides a home for a rich growth of new coral, sponges, tubastrea and large schools of fish.

VILIGILI

Probably the most obvious day trip from Male' is the short ferry ride to Viligili, the closest thing Male' has to a suburb, just

1km from the western shore of the capital. The short boat ride takes you into a different world. Far more relaxed than Male', Viligili has something of a Caribbean feel to it, with its brightly painted houses and laid-back pace. Here Maleans come to enjoy some space, play football and go swimming (usually fully clothed after the conservative fashion typically found on inhabited islands here – this is no place to be seen in a bikini). While it's still a great deal more cosmopolitan than most inhabited islands in the Maldives, if you only visit Male' and resorts, this is perhaps the best chance you'll have of seeing everyday life. There's nothing much to see but it's a pleasant excursion from Male'. The Symphony Garden, a pretty outdoor café by the harbour, is the most obvious place for refreshments. Viligili is easy to get to. Just catch one of the frequent dhoni ferries from New Harbour on the southwest corner of Male' (Rf3, 10 mins, every 5 mins).

HULHULE'

Better known as the airport island, Hulhule' was once densely wooded with very few inhabitants – just a graveyard and a reputation for being haunted. The first airstrip was built here in 1960, and in the early 1980s it had a major upgrade to accommodate long-distance passenger jets. Airport facilities have expanded to keep pace with the burgeoning tourist industry and now include a sizable terminal, workshops, administrative buildings, staff housing and the **Hulhule' Island Hotel** (p100; ☎ 3330888). Sea-planes land in the lagoon on the east side of the island. Everyone passes through on their way in and out of the country, but it's also a serious leisure option from Male' too due to the excellent swimming pool at the hotel, which is popular with expats who come to swim in the pool, drink in the bar or enjoy a good meal. The hotel runs a free transfer boat 14 times a day, from beside the President's Jetty (Jetty No 1) in Male'. Day membership that allows use of the swimming pool costs US\$10; annual membership is available.

HULHUMALE'

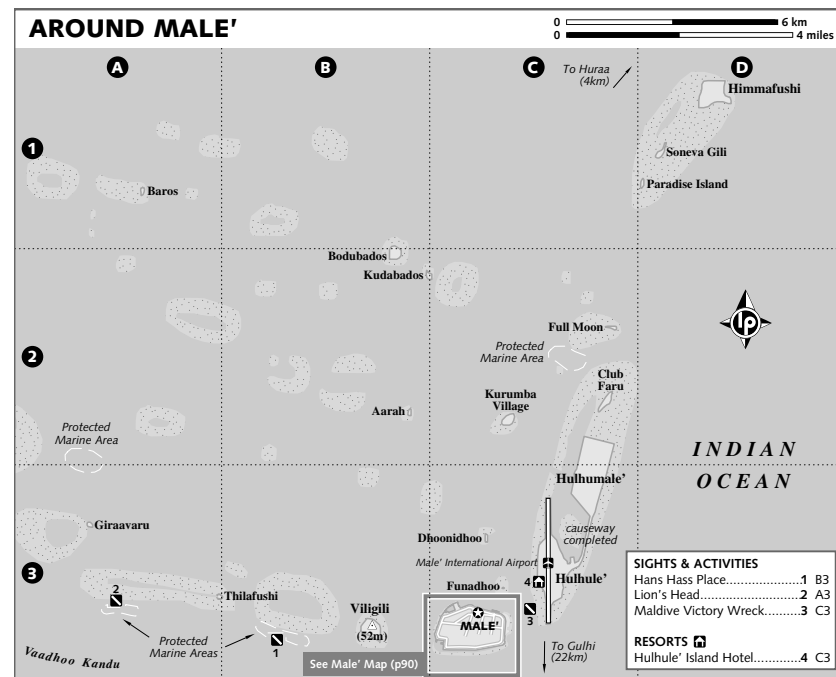
One fascinating half-day trip from Male' is to easily accessible Hulhumale' – or, as many people see it – the future of the Mal-

dives. Here, on the other side of the airport, 1.8 sq km of reef has been built up to create a brand new and entirely manmade island – the first phase of an ambitious project to relieve the pressure of growth on Male'. Sand and coral were dug up from the lagoon and pumped into big heaps on the reef top. Then bulldozers pushed the rubble around to form a quadrilateral of dry land about 2km long and 1km wide, joined by a causeway to the airport island. It's built up to about 2m above sea level to provide a margin of protection against the possibility of sea-level rises.

This utopian project began in 1997 and now the northern section (about an eighth of the island's total area) is a fully functioning town, complete with rather Soviet apartment blocks, a school, an Internet café, pharmacy, an array of shops and a huge mosque – the golden glass dome of which is visible from all over the southern part of North Male' Atoll. There's even a surprisingly attractive artificial beach down the eastern side of the island. Coming here makes a fascinating contrast to the chaotic capital – here the planning is so precise and mathematical you could be on the film set of *Brave New World*. Walking across the acres of as yet empty plots of land towards the tiny conurbation on the far side is an eerie experience and a bewildering glimpse into the future of the Maldivian nation if sea levels continue to rise.

When the first-phase land is fully developed, by 2020, it will accommodate 50,000 people and have waterfront esplanades, light industrial areas, government offices, shopping centres, boulevards of palm trees, a marina and a national stadium. The basic layout has been carefully planned, but the details are still flexible, allowing for some natural, organic growth through multiple private developments. The second phase, a long-term proposal, involves reclaiming a further 2.4 sq km of land (engulfing all of Farukolhufushi, currently the Club Faru resort) and bringing the total population of Hulhumale' to around 100,000 people.

To visit Hulhumale' take the ferry (Rf5, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes) from the newly built terminal next to the airport ferry jetty and opposite the Maagiri Lodge.



On the island a bus service connects the ferry terminal to the settlement, but most people seem to enjoy the 10-minute walk.

OTHER ISLANDS

With so many small islands in the Maldives, it's not uncommon for individual islands to be allocated to specific activities or uses. One example is **Funadhoo**, between the airport and Male', which is used for fuel storage – it's a safe distance from inhabited areas, and convenient for both sea-going tankers and smaller boats serving the atolls.

One of the fastest-growing islands in the country, west of Viligili, is **Thilafushi**, also known as 'Rubbish Island'. It's where the capital dumps its garbage. The land is earmarked for industrial development, and its three conspicuous, round towers are part of a cement factory, which has just been built.

The island of **Dhoonidhoo**, just north of Male', was the British governor's residence until 1964. The house is now used for detaining people who may disrupt Maldivian society (political prisoners to you and me).

Slightly further north, **Aarah** is a small island used as the president's holiday retreat.

Another 3km further north, the island of **Kudabandos** was saved from resort development and became the Kuda Bandos Reserve, to be preserved in its natural state for the people's enjoyment. It has a few facilities for day-trippers, but is otherwise undeveloped – a small island encircled by a white beach. Tourists come to Kudabandos on 'island-hopping' trips from nearby resorts. Maldivian families and groups come on weekends and holidays. The **Bandos Island Resort's Male' office** (☎ 332529) arranges a boat most Fridays for local people for about Rf30, including the Rf10 entry fee.

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