When should YOU travel to the Maldives?

We’ve created this “guide” to assist first time travelers to the Maldives in planning their adventure. Not every itinerary, or every dive site, or every price range is for everyone. Take the time now to make the right choice by minimizing surprises and maximizing your total dive holiday experience!

There are two distinct diving seasons in the Maldives. Choosing which season is right for you can be a very important decision. Within each season, there are factors that should affect your decision.

What are the factors? Itinerary / Currents / Visibility / Price / Sea life

A note about the two seasons: Maldives diving is year round. Each season brings the opportunity to see the same creatures, BIG and small. What makes the seasons different are the conditions. Of interest: the Maldives waters support the world’s largest known population of reef manta rays all year round.

The Southwest Season: May-October

During the Southwest season from May-October diving on the west side of the atolls can be very active - good visibility typically attracts large schools of pelagic creatures including different species of sharks, tuna, wrasse, rays and turtles. Diving on the east side of the atolls can make this season very special. Though the visibility will be decreased due to the increased plankton, it is the best time and place in the Maldives to see manta rays and whale sharks, making up for the reduced viz. This is manta feeding season so there are usually more mantas during these months. The months of June and July are the ‘official’ rainy season. Because the Maldives is in the equatorial belt, severe storms and cyclones are extremely rare events.

Itinerary: Several to choose from – of special interest this year (2015) are the 7-night itineraries starting or ending in Ari in August and September (these require a domestic flight for around $165pp but well worth it if you like avoiding crowds). Since most boats will be headed back to Male you’ll have time and space on the day before departure to snorkel in South Ari, hopefully with the whalesharks! And, don’t forget, any itinerary with Baa atoll will likely feature manta feeding stations. In 2016, look for itineraries in July and September that start or end in Baa – you’ll have the same situation as in the one-way Ari trips except, if you’re lucky, in Baa you’ll be snorkeling with the manta rays on your day before departure!

Currents: The currents are not typically as strong this time of year or on these itineraries. These itineraries are recommended for those who may not be advanced divers or very comfortable in strong currents.

Visibility: Will be reduced, especially on the east side of the atolls, but, remember, reduced visibility means more plankton which means more mantas!!!

Price: From $300-$400 less per person than the Northeast Season. 7-night trips start at $2320pp in 2015 and $2420pp in 2016; 10-night trips start at $3370pp in 2015 and $3520pp in 2016.

Sea life: As mentioned above, same creatures year round but there are definitely more mantas hanging out and feeding around Baa Atoll this time of year. And, don’t forget about the macro photography opportunities – this is not only a big animal destination…the little guys are here, too!
The Northeast Season: November-April

The Northeast season from November-April is the Maldivian summer though there is little difference in temperatures from season to season. Conditions are drier, visibility is generally very good and the reef life is usually colorful. Current can be very strong dependent upon itinerary. Due to currents flowing from the northeast, there can be a lot of shark action on the east side of the atolls. During this season, the manta and whale sharks will mostly be found on the west side of the atolls.

Itinerary: Several to choose from – Central Island itineraries (consisting of North Male, Ari, Rasdhoo and South Male) are ‘typical’ of the Maldives. Because of their reputation, these itineraries are very popular with liveaboards and resorts alike. You will find itineraries that go north, some that go south and some that go deep south. Most itineraries that go north will be more like the ones described above in the Southwest Season. Those that go a little south will likely include Vaavu and/or Meemu where channel diving will be the norm. Here the currents are definitely stronger and you should be comfortable diving in variable up-and-down-currents if you select one of these itineraries. For the deep south trips that start or end in Addu, even more experience is required – these trips feature up to 3 dives a day (rather than our normal 4), all channel diving and lots of transit time. These are exhilarating trips but should be reserved for divers experienced in diving in strong currents and who love diving with sharks!

Currents: On average, the currents begin to flow in November and get stronger through January. As we move into February they begin to subside a bit and April has more slack currents. But, it depends a great deal on what itinerary you are on – the further south you go, the stronger the current due to the amount of channel diving. In addition, April and November are months where the currents start changing therefore making them more difficult for the dive guides to predict.

Visibility: Should be very good on the east side of the atolls; can be a little reduced on the west side but that’s where you’re more likely to find the mantas and whale sharks.

Price: From $300-$400 more per person than the Southwest Season. 7-night trips start at $2740pp and 10-night trips start at $3935pp.

Sea life: As mentioned above, same creatures year round but there will be more species of sharks the further south you go. The reef life can be beautiful. Good photo opportunities but it can be very challenging on itineraries with strong current, especially with a large housing with strobes.

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