# The Maldives

## Cetaceans & Tropical Seabirds



**Spinner Dolphins by Niels Poul Dreyer**

*The Maldives is an island nation nestled in the tropical waters of the central Indian Ocean, some 400 miles south-west of the southern tip of India. This tiny, idyllic Republic is composed entirely of coral atolls on which a staggering 1,200 sandy islands nestle. These are the picture postcard islands of your dreams, furnished with a tropical décor of swaying palms, white sand beaches and turquoise lagoons.*

*Although much-praised as a tourist destination, these exquisite islands are less well-known for the bounty of whale and dolphin species that swim these warm tropical waters.*

*On your days with us, you can expect some of the finest cetacean viewing on the planet; in the last two seasons our lead guide, a well-known authority on cetaceans, has seen an astounding 18 different species. Whilst keeping an eye out for tropical seabirds, we will scan the waters for such delights as Spinner and Risso's Dolphins, Sperm Whales and the gargantuan Blue Whale, the largest animal ever to have lived on the planet! This wealth of cetacean species is complimented by a variety of tropical pelagic birds, and we will spend our days scanning for Black-naped Tern, Bulwer's Petrel, Flesh-footed Shearwater and White-bellied Storm Petrel, to name a few.*

*As a distraction from the joys aboard our charming boat, we will take the time to stroll upon the bleached shores of some of the quaint islands and snorkel the teeming waters replete with a treasure chest of tropical fish. This is an unforgettable adventure, and we invite you to join us on this magical ocean and wildlife experience!*

# *Itinerary & Map*

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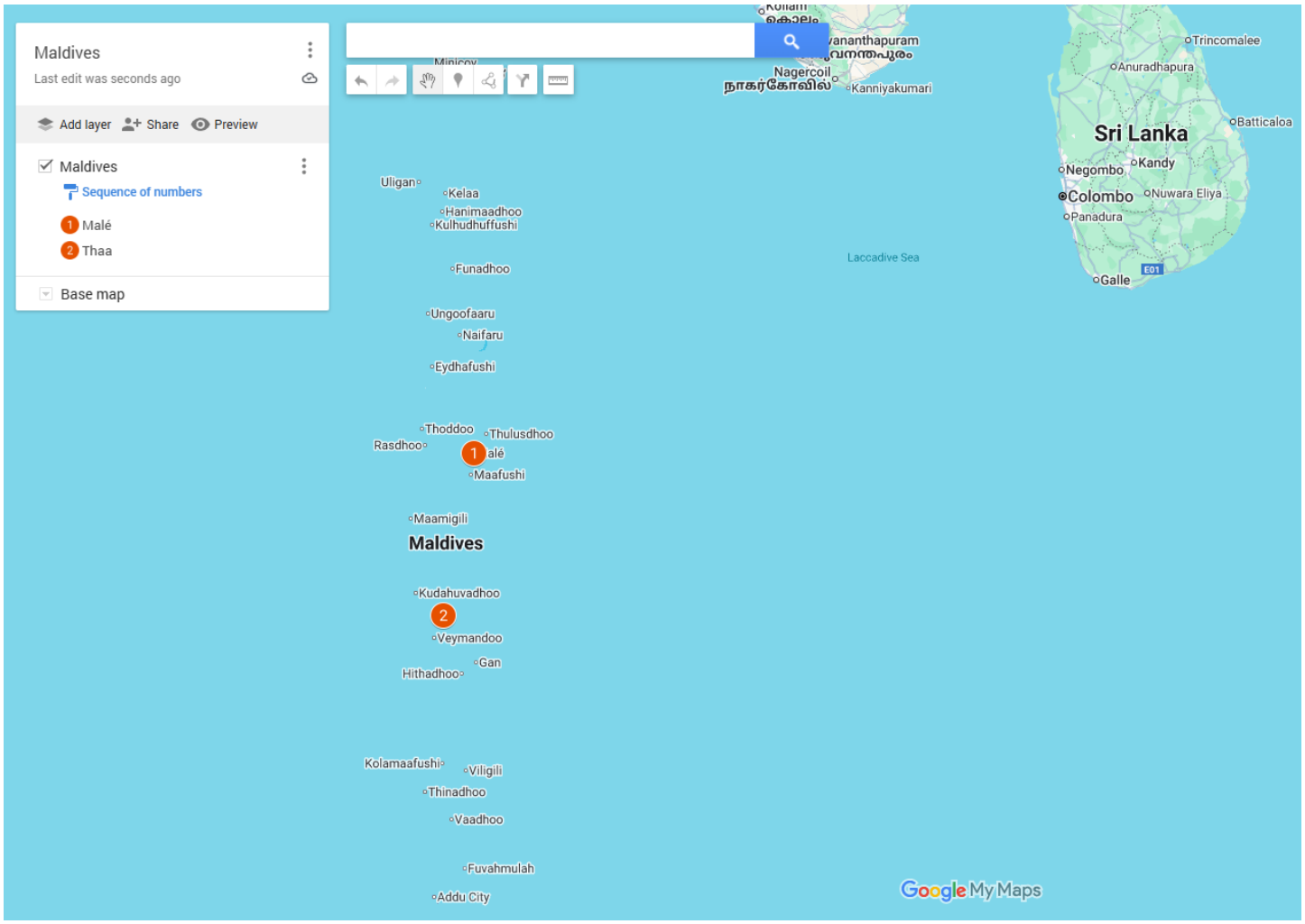
| **Day 1** | **Arrival in The Maldives** |
| **Days 2 to 5** | **Cruising south in search of cetaceans, birds and other marine life** |
| **Days 6 to 9** | **Thaa Atoll** |
| **Days 10 & 11** | **Heading north towards Malé Atoll** |
| **Days 12 & 13** | **Malé Atoll** |
| **Day 14** | **Final departure from The Maldives** |



## *Birding sites in detail*

Upon arrival at Malé International Airport, the gateway to the breath-taking Maldives, we will transfer to our specially chartered live-aboard vessel. She has a full-time local crew, including an experienced captain and a dedicated cook. All cabins are en-suite and air-conditioned and, although not luxurious, are perfect for our requirements on this wildlife cruise.



**Short-finned Pilot Whales by Adam Riley**

With a little luck, we can expect our first cetacean sighting while still in sight of the airport! Tonight, and every night, we will anchor in a sheltered location within one of the atolls. Depending on anchoring time, there may be time for a swim, snorkel, or island visit. This first evening there will be an orientation talk, and most other evenings there will be an opportunity to attend a video or slide show, presented by the tour leader.

**Cruising south in search of cetaceans, birds and other marine life.** A typical day in this paradise will begin with the option of a refreshing snorkel. We will then cruise into the atolls and begin our search for wildlife.

Short-finned Pilot Whale, Pan-tropical Spotted Dolphin, Striped Dolphin, and Dwarf Sperm Whale can all be expected. Recent highlights in these waters have included superb views of Sperm Whale, Bryde's Whale, as well as Cuvier's, Blainville's and Indo-pacific Beaked Whales.

The Indo-pacific (Longman's) Beaked Whale was long considered the rarest whale in the world but is now known to occur regularly around the Maldives. On most trips, 10 to 12 cetacean species can be observed, many bow-riding and admired at very close range! We expect to see between 50 and 90 separate cetacean sightings on our trip, which could total a staggering number of between 2,000 & 3,000 animals! In addition to the above-mentioned species, we also have a chance of seeing Fraser's Dolphin, Pygmy Killer Whale, Melon-headed Whale, False Killer Whale, Killer Whale, and Rough-toothed Dolphin.

Although the Maldives are not renowned for its birdwatching, in part because there is not a great diversity of habitats, there is plenty of interest for us to search for. About 170 avian species have been recorded from the



**Typical island scenery by Clive Wyatt**



**Tropical Shearwater by Adam Riley**

islands and, as the area is under-birded, many more species (particularly migrants) undoubtedly await discovery. As this tour takes place during the northern spring, all the Palaearctic migrants are still around - so there is a real possibility of getting a first record for the islands! Seabirds will be the main attraction, however, and we will keep a keen eye out for Tropical and Short-tailed Shearwaters, Jouanin's Petrel, Swinhoe's Storm Petrel, White-cheeked, Saunder's and Black-naped Terns. In quiet bays, we will look for the bizarre Crab Plover and uncommon Lesser Sand Plover. Each evening we will anchor in the lagoon of an atoll, where there will be an opportunity to swim, snorkel or visit a nearby island. Our itinerary will be very flexible, allowing us to maximise on the cetacean and bird movements, and you will find passing the days with us relaxing and above all, very rewarding. We will explore the atolls, soaking up the beautiful scenery, exploring the waters for dolphins, whales, flying fish and seabirds. A further blessing of being on these waters is the distance we will be from city lights and atop the deck at night, we will be treated to the equatorial skies bejewelled with stars!

**Thaa Atoll.** We have several days around the southern Thaa Atoll, spending time with the area's numerous cetaceans. We should also be able to visit some of the islands and coral reefs of the region, which are simply superb!

**Malé Atoll.** We slowly work our way back northwards, by a different route from the one we took down to Thaa Atoll. On at least one day, we hope to visit a site where Manta Rays regularly congregate, and you may be afforded the privileged opportunity to swim with these graceful creatures.

We will also have around a day of cetacean watching off the Malé Atoll while our vessel moves towards the main port at Malé. During the evening, we will enjoy a farewell dinner together.



**Pan-tropical Spotted Dolphins by Niels Poul Dreyer**

**EXPEDITION LEADER:**

This trip will be led by Dr Charles Anderson, a professional marine biologist who has lived and worked in the Maldives since 1983. He is the foremost authority on both cetaceans and fishes in the Maldives, and the pioneer of whale and dolphin watching there. In addition to numerous scientific papers, he has published a series of six guides to the marine life of the islands. He is an accomplished underwater photographer and will present a series of evening slide shows on marine life during the course of each trip. On some trips, he will be assisted by his wife Susan Anderson, who is a qualified nurse as well as an experienced and enthusiastic whale spotter.

# *Financial Arrangements and Important Notes*

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 14;
- All nights on the live-aboard;
- Government tourist tax;
- Atoll permits;
- Transfers from airport to boat and back; and
- All guiding services of Dr. Charles Anderson.

Tour exclusions:

- ANY International and/or domestic flights;
- Government green tax (currently US$6.00 pp per night, payable in cash on board)
- Visas and Travel insurance;
- Laundry, drinks and other items of a personal nature.
- Drinks and meals away from the live-aboard vessel;
- Airport taxes; and
- Any gratuities and items of a personal nature such as diving, telephone calls and laundry.

**Single Supplement**: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**Tipping**: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **Costs are subject to major foreign exchange fluctuations and unforeseen increases in tour related costs (especially the price of fuel) and may have to be adjusted as a result. You will be notified by email if fuel surcharges, or other price adjustments need to be implemented.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- For those who would like to spend some more time in the beautiful Maldives, we can arrange a stay on a resort island immediately before or after your birding and cetacean cruise.
- This tour is very flexible, and we attempt to maximise the time we spend at sightings, so there are no set moorings or routes for the tour.
- The Maldives islands span the equator, stretching from about 7°N to ½°S, so the climate is tropical. From late January to April, and again during October-November, the weather is normally calm and sunny, with just the

occasional shower. These are the very best times to visit. During our boat-based trips the sea should be calm, which makes for ideal offshore whale-watching.

- Temperatures do not vary much throughout the year. Daytime air temperatures typically reach 29-31°C during the day, dropping to about 25-27°C at night. Sea breezes make this quite comfortable. Sea temperatures average about 28°C, which makes for luxurious snorkelling!
- Our vessel is the M.V. Keana (c30m) and has 8 guest cabins. All cabins are on the main and upper decks; all are en-suite and well-ventilated with optional air-conditioning. There are ample shaded viewing areas on both the main and upper decks.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

Please ensure that you arrive by 10:00 on day 1 of the tour, which will allow enough time for the transfer from Malé International Airport (IATA: MLE), to the cruise vessel. After breakfast on day 14, we disembark and transfer to Malé International Airport where the tour will conclude.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Malé International Airport (IATA: MLE) is the main port of entry for international flights into The Maldives.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

**DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.**