The Maldives have long been a destination at the top of many divers’ bucket list and for good reason. With picture-perfect lagoons, brilliant white sand beaches, swaying palm trees and colourful coral reefs teeming with life, the Maldives hold the allure of visiting a living postcard.

The Republic of the Maldives is a small Islamic nation of roughly 1190 tiny islands and 270,000 people stretched across a vast expanse of the Indian Ocean just south and west of India. The low-lying coral islands, none reaching higher than a few metres above sea level, and innumerable reefs form 26 atolls and the total territorial area is 115,300 square kilometres, of which only 298 is actually dry land. Many islands are uninhabited. Many are home to the Maldives residents and are difficult for tourists to visit. But a number of small islands scattered throughout the archipelago have been set aside for tourism, each with a single resort.

Some divers come here looking for liveaboard adventures. With so much ocean to explore, who can blame them? For those seeking shipboard adventures, there are several well-appointed and well-known liveaboards that operate in these waters. But for some, the idea of spending time in a luxury resort with access to world-class diving just minutes away from spectacular beaches and comfortable accommodation is an unbeatable combination.

Our adventure in the Maldives centered on the Ari Atoll, with a home base on Rangali Island and the Conrad Resort. After arriving in the international airport on Male, we boarded a seaplane for a quick 30-minute flight to Rangali. From the air we had spectacular views of the islands, reefs and atolls of this very special place. Like a necklace of fine jewels, the islands dot the blue water below and each one looks more inviting than the next. Visitors take speedboats or seaplanes to their respective resorts. We were fortunate that a seaplane is necessary to get to Rangali, which provided us a unique perspective on the islands and, for us, was the much-preferred option!

After settling in and getting a good night’s sleep in an over-water bungalow, it was time to go diving. Our first dive...
Throughout the week of diving we visited shipwrecks, thilas, walls and other coral mazes filled with abundant marine life. Lionfish, soldierfish, pufferfish and many other intriguing fish species kept our cameras firing and our memory cards full.

Resort diving in the Maldives does not come at the expense of great diving. Divers can enjoy world class diving along spectacular coral jungles while also drinking in the comfort and beauty of the island based resorts. Most of the dives are done as two-tank excursions, although an occasional all-day 3-tank diving safari is offered along with shorter onetank trips and night dives.

The best months for diving in the Maldives are January through April when the islands are blessed with fine weather and terrific visibility. Once the rainy season starts in May, clouds and storms are frequent all the way through September, with many days of diving lost to rough water conditions. October and November have calm weather but the waters are cloudy due to annual plankton blooms. These months offer reduced visibility in exchange for the opportunity to see larger pelagics such as whale sharks and mantas rays. In all seasons, divers should be prepared for strong currents on many dives.

The Maldives Islands have been at the forefront of environmental protection. Recently Mohamed Aslam, the Environment Minister of the Maldives, announced the protection of coral reefs and waters in and around Baa atoll Hanifaru, Baa atoll An’gafaru and South Ari atoll Moamigili, all with a focus on protecting sharks and other critically threatened species. The reefs here are under siege, as they are the world over, from rising water temperatures and other pressures. For divers who visit today, however, these reefs remain a rainbow of brilliant and vibrant colour and they host a fascinating array of marine life.

6 A school of plankton eating white edge soldierfish Myripristis vitrata
7 The striking powder blue surgeonfish Acanthurus leucosternon often forms large and dense schools in the Maldives. Found in most clear water reef habitats to about 20m.
8 A gaudily coloured bivalve.
9 The jewel fairybasslet Pseudanthias squamipinnis is found around coral outcrops in clear lagoons, patch reefs and steep slopes to a depth of 35m.
10 The beautiful red line goby Nemateleotris magnifica is found on the upper reef.
11 Visitors transfer to seaplane for a 30 minute flight to Rangali Island.
12 These fish know they have to give this shark a wide berth!
Getting There
The international airport is located on the main island of Male and is serviced by direct flights from Dubai, Colombo (Sri Lanka) and a few other destinations.
Visitors will board speedboats or seaplanes depending on the location and distance of the resort. Check with your resort for arrangements. Many upscale resorts have pleasant lounges at the main airport where visitors can wait for transfers. Tours of Male can be arranged if the transfer time is longer than a few hours in duration. A valid passport is required for entry. Visas are not required.

Baggage
Allowances vary for each international carrier so check before you leave. There are strict weight limits on the seaplanes so check with your carriers before departing.

Weather
The Maldives has an equatorial tropical climate. December through April is the dry season. February through April is the hottest time of the year, with temperatures in the 80s and 90s Fahrenheit each day. May through November is the rainy season.

Currency
The local currency is the rufiya (Rf) but US Dollars and Euros are generally accepted at all resorts.

Electricity
Power voltage is 220 Volts to 240 Volts (50 Hz). Double-check your appliance compatibility before plugging them in! Converters/adaptors are usually available on request at your hotel front desk.

Customs
The Republic of the Maldives is a strict Islamic nation. Alcohol, firearms, pornography, pork, narcotics and ‘idols of worship’ are among the prohibited items. Because of the concern over evangelists spreading their beliefs within the country, attention is paid to religious items. A small crucifix, worn as jewelry, is unlikely to be a problem but a suitcase with several bibles will likely create concern!