



UNEXPLORED MALDIVES THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

We've all heard of the luxury resorts and powdered sugar beaches the Maldives is famous for. But uncover some of the island nation's less well-known attractions and you'll be rewarded with some unique experiences...

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Naturally, being the Maldives, Thoddoo also has a spectacular beach

Lucie Mohelnikova



Feni and Marcel Kaspar

'Gaaffaru' once used to chug between Male' and Colombo

THE SHIPYARD

"Thar she blows!" Her rusting bow protrudes 5m above the water at a 45-degree angle, like a breaching whale. 'The Shipyard' in Lhaviyani Atoll is one of the most dramatic-looking scuba dive sites in the entire Maldives and it consists of two thrilling shipwrecks. The first one, rearing up out of the water, was once a cold storage ship for a Japanese cargo company. In 1985

"Skipjack 1" was due to be scuttled between Lhaviyani Atoll and Baa Atoll but caught fire and sank on the spot it lies on today.

The origin of the second ship (submerged 30 metres underwater) is a mystery but it is believed to have entered Maldivian waters illegally before running aground. The authorities seized it, named it 'Gaaffaru' and operated it as a



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The vast hulk of 'Skipjack 1'

cargo vessel between Male' and Colombo. In 1992 it sprung a leak and the captain urgently tried to divert it to Felivaru, but it sank just short of its destination.

The allure of a shipwreck is indisputable, and today both wrecks are encrusted with beautiful corals and sponges. Angelfish, batfish, stingrays and napoleon wrasse frequent the ethereal remains.



Akthar Naseem

Tales of fairies, queens and princesses surround the mysterious 'Fairy Lake'

ADDU ATOLL

Once part of the tiny breakaway United Suvadive Republic (a short-lived attempt at independence from Male' in 1959) the heart-shaped Addu Atoll lies just south of the equator. Usually travellers in the Maldives have to rely on boats, but here in 'Addu City' you can island-hop by bicycle! This is because the British built a causeway linking Gan with Feydhoo, Maradhoo-Feydhoo, Maradhoo and Hithadhoo, thus providing no less than 16km of road to zoom along.



Naj Hameed

A reminder of Gan's British military past

In 1941 the British established a naval base and airstrips in Gan, which later operated as RAF Gan

until its closure in 1976. Today, many of the original military buildings and a war memorial still remain. The

majority were transformed into a resort and shops, while the hospital became a dive centre, but Gan still retains a distinctive atmosphere unlike anywhere else.

According to legends, queens (who in Maldivian folklore were also fairies!) were said to have bathed in the pale green waters of the 'Queen's Lake' (also known as 'Fairy Lake' and 'Princess Lake') in Hithadhoo. It's a beautiful spot where you can soak up the tranquil atmosphere and admire the shimmering water. While the fairies themselves might not make an appearance, one 'fairy' you'll be guaranteed to spot is the Fairy Tern (White Tern) which can be found in no other area of the Maldives, save Addu Atoll.



Naj Hameed

'Addu City' is a collection of islands



Lucie Mohelnikova

Passion fruit grown in Thoddoo

THODDOO

Watermelons, papayas, bananas, passion fruit...the lush island of Thoddoo in Alif Alif Atoll is bursting with mouth-watering tropical delights. It may be only 1km long, but this Garden of Eden is one of the biggest producers of fruit and vegetables in the country – no mean feat in such a sandy nation! But even more enchanting than the verdant landscape is the mythology surrounding the ruins



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A farmer carefully inspects his produce



Michael O'Shea

The head of the ancient Buddha statue

of Thoddoo's Buddhist temple. In 1959 archaeologists uncovered an extremely "unusual" stupa where a huge statue of Buddha had lain hidden for almost 800 years.

According to local narratives, when the Maldives was declared an Islamic kingdom in 1153 the inhabitants of the then-Buddhist island wanted to save their relic so they removed it from its prime position and placed it upright on the temple floor. Stone slabs and sand were carefully piled up around it, forming a mound. Some versions of the story say the inhabitants habitually decorated the stupa with flowers. What lay beneath it remained a secret to outsiders for centuries. And it appears to have been a scared site since ancient times; Roman coins minted in 90 BC, a ceremonial silver bowl and a gold cylinder were also discovered there. The head of the Buddha statue was transported to the National Museum in Male'.

FUVAHMULAH

The one-island-atoll of Fuvahmulah was also once part of the United Suvadive Republic. Its distinctive features include two freshwater lakes, marshland, tropical woodlands and taro fields. But the beaches are the most eye-catching aspect. Unlike anywhere else in the Maldives, they are made up of smooth, shiny, white pebbles of varying sizes, while "kalho-akiri" (black pebbles) appear on the southeast shore. The most impressive of all these beaches is Thundi, where a natural, shallow swimming pool forms annually, attracting hundreds of locals. Maldivians consider this beach to be the most beautiful in the entire



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Thundi beach on Fuvahmulah is said to be the most beautiful in the Maldives

Maldives – and that's really saying something!

Perhaps it is the island's isolation (300 miles from Male'), combined with

frequent rough seas, which makes it tricky to approach by boat, that has ensured Fuvahmulah remains one of the Maldives' best-kept secrets. ☺