MAGIC MALDIVES · TRAVEL GUIDE

Kaafu Atoll

The atoll that holds the capital, the airport and the cheapest boat rides in the country. Almost every Maldives trip starts here.

CAPITAL ISLAND
Malé

INHABITED ISLANDS
9

FROM MALé
30–90 min by speedboat; public ferry from

BEST MONTHS
January to April for the calmest crossings

AIRPORT
Velana International (MLE) — the atoll contains

Known for

Maafushi, Thulusdhoo and Guraidhoo — the islands that made independent travel in the Maldives possible. Thulusdhoo's Cokes and Chickens are two of the country's best-known surf breaks.

About Kaafu Atoll

Kaafu is where the Maldives is easiest. The international airport sits inside the atoll, the boat rides are short, and the local islands south of Malé hold more guesthouses than anywhere else in the country. If it is your first trip, or a short one, this is the sensible base.

Getting here

You are already here when you land. Velana International is on Hulhulé, inside Kaafu. From the airport jetty a public ferry or a speedboat reaches the nearest guesthouse islands in under two hours — often in half of that.

Which island to pick

Maafushi is the busiest and best equipped, with the widest choice of guesthouses and excursions, and the most other travellers. Thulusdhoo is for surfers. Guraidhoo and Gulhi are quieter and closer to the reefs. Dhiffushi and Gaafaru are further out and feel it.

What it costs

Kaafu is the cheapest atoll to reach and among the cheapest to stay in, but it is also the most commercialised. If you want an island where you are the only visitor, look south to Vaavu or west to Ari.

Highlights

- The shortest and cheapest transfers in the Maldives, 30–90 minutes
- Maafushi, Thulusdhoo, Guraidhoo, Dhiffushi, Himmafushi, Huraa, Gulhi and Gaafaru all take independent guests
- Cokes and Chickens surf breaks off Thulusdhoo
- The densest day-excursion market in the country — sandbanks, dolphins, night fishing
- Malé fish market, worth a morning on its own

Getting there and getting around

Public ferry from Malé

From Malé: 30–90 min by speedboat; public ferry from about 1.5 hrs

On a local island

These are inhabited Muslim islands. Cover shoulders and knees away from the designated bikini beach, which every tourist island here has. Alcohol is not sold on local islands; some guesthouses run an evening trip to a floating bar. During Ramadan cafés close in daylight hours.

Common questions

How do I get from Malé airport to Maafushi?

Public ferry or speedboat, both leaving from the Malé side. The speedboat takes about 30 minutes and runs several times a day; the ferry is much cheaper and slower, and does not run on Fridays. Search the route and date on this site to see what is actually running.

Is Kaafu Atoll good for a first trip to the Maldives?

It is the usual starting point. Transfers are short and cheap, there is more accommodation than in any other atoll, and the excursion market is the densest in the country.

Can you drink alcohol on the local islands in Kaafu?

No. Alcohol is not sold on inhabited islands anywhere in the Maldives. Some guesthouses arrange an evening trip to a floating bar or a nearby resort.