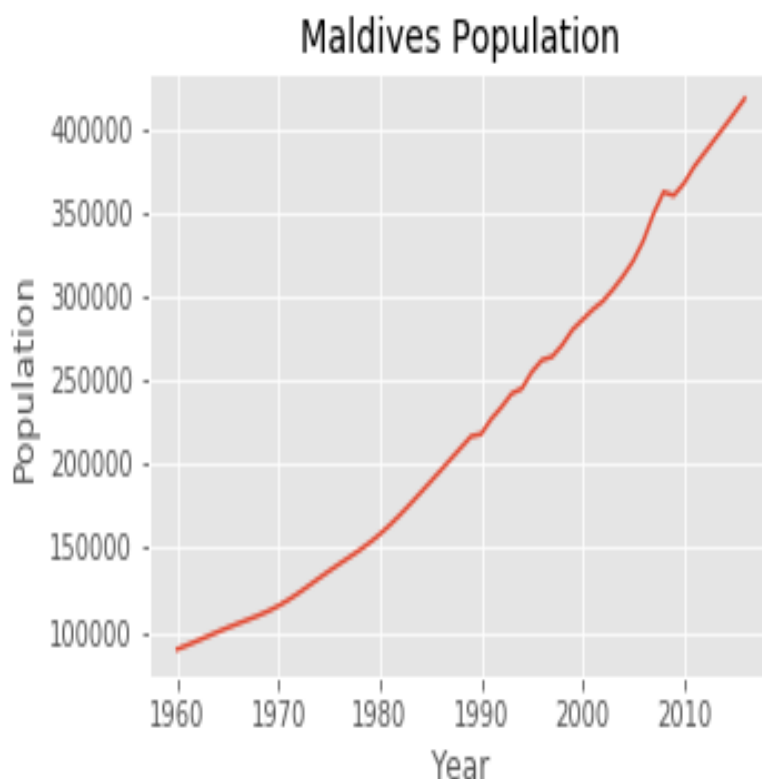


Maldives



The Maldives (or (listen); Dhivehi: ދިވެހިރާއްޖެ Dhivehi Raa'jey), officially the Republic of Maldives, is a South Asian island country, located in the Indian Ocean, situated in the Arabian Sea. It lies southwest of Sri Lanka and India. The chain of 26 atolls stretches from Ihavandhippolhu Atoll in the north to the Addu City in the south. Comprising a territory spanning roughly 298 square kilometres (115 sq mi), the Maldives is one of the world's most geographically dispersed countries, as well as the smallest Asian country by both land area and population, with around 427,756 inhabitants. Malé is the capital and most populated city, traditionally called the "King's Island" for its central location. The Maldives archipelago is located atop the Chagos-Laccadive Ridge, a vast submarine mountain range in the Indian Ocean, which also forms a terrestrial ecoregion, together with the Chagos and the Lakshadweep. With an average ground-level elevation of 1.5 metres (4 ft 11 in) above sea level, it is the world's lowest country, with even its highest natural point being the lowest in the world, at 2.4 metres (7 ft 10 in). Due to the consequent risks posed by rising sea levels, the government pledged in 2009 to make the Maldives a carbon-neutral country by 2019. The Maldivian archipelago took to Islam in the 12th century and consolidated as a sultanate, developing strong commercial and cultural ties with Asia and Africa. From the mid 16th-century, the region came under the increasing influence of European colonial powers, with the Maldives becoming a British protectorate in 1887. Independence from the United Kingdom was achieved in 1965 and a presidential republic was established in 1968 with an elected People's Majlis. The ensuing decades have been characterised by political instability, efforts at democratic reform, and environmental challenges posed by climate change. The Maldives is a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It is also a member of the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Non Aligned Movement. The World Bank classifies the Maldives as having an upper middle income economy. Fishing has historically been the dominant economic activity, and remains the largest sector by far, followed by the rapidly growing tourism industry. Along with Sri Lanka, it is one of only two South Asian countries rated "high" on the Human Development Index, with its per capita income one of the highest

among SAARC nations. The Maldives was a Commonwealth republic from July 1982 until its withdrawal from the Commonwealth in October 2016 in protest of international criticism of its records in relation to corruption and human rights. == Toponymy == The name "Maldives" may derive from the Tamil words *maalai* (garland / evening) and *theevu* (island), or **මාලා ධීවරා** (*Maala Divaina*, "Necklace Islands") in Sinhala. The Maldivian people are called *Dhivehin*. The word *theevu* (archaic *heevu*, related to Tamil **தீவு**, *dheevu*) means "island", and *Dhives* (*Dhivehin*) means "islanders" (i.e., Maldivians). The ancient Sri Lankan chronicle *Mahawamsa* refers to an island called *Mahiladiva* ("Island of Women", **මාහිලාදිව**) in Pali, which is probably a mistranslation of the same Sanskrit word meaning "garland". Jan S Hogendorn, Grossman Professor of Economics, theorises that the name Maldives derives from the Sanskrit *māla-dvīpa* (**मालाद्वीप**), meaning "garland of islands". In Tamil, "Garland of Islands" can be translated as *Malai Theevu* (**மலைதீவு**). In Malayalam, "Garland of Islands" can be translated as *Maladweepu* (**മലദ്വീപ്**). In Kannada, "Garland of Islands" can be translated as *Maaledweepa* (**ಮಾಲೇದ್ವೀಪ**). None of these names is mentioned in any literature, but classical Sanskrit texts dating back to the Vedic period mention the "Hundred Thousand Islands" (*Lakshadweepa*), a generic name which would include not only the Maldives, but also the Laccadives, Aminidivi Islands, Minicoy, and the Chagos island groups. Some medieval travellers such as Ibn Battuta called the islands *Mahal Dibiyat* (**مهل ديبات**) from the Arabic word *mahal* ("palace"), which must be how the Berber traveller interpreted the local name, having been through Muslim North India, where Perso-Arabic words were introduced to the local vocabulary. This is the name currently inscribed on the scroll in the Maldivian state emblem. The classical Persian/Arabic name for Maldives is *Dibajat*. The Dutch referred to the islands as the *Maldivische Eilanden* (pronounced [māliˈdivis̺i ˈiːlənˈd̪ə(n)]), while the British anglicised the local name for the islands first to the "Maldive Islands" and later to "Maldives". Garcia da Orta writes in his conversational book first published in 1563 as follows: "I must tell you that I have heard it said that the natives do not call it *Maldiva* but *Nalediva*. In the Malabar language *nale* means four and *diva* island. So that in that language the word signifies "four islands," while we, corrupting the name, call it *Maldiva*." == History ==

=== Ancient history and settlement === The first Maldivians did not leave any archaeological artifacts. Their buildings were probably built of wood, palm fronds and other perishable materials, which would have quickly decayed in the salt and wind of the tropical climate. Moreover, chiefs or headmen did not reside in elaborate stone palaces, nor did their religion require the construction of large temples or compounds. Comparative studies of Maldivian oral, linguistic and cultural traditions and customs confirm that the first settlers were people from the southern shores of the neighboring Indian subcontinent, including the *Giraavaru* people mentioned in ancient legends and local folklore about the establishment of the capital and kingly rule in *Malé*. A strong underlying layer of Dravidian population and culture survives in Maldivian society, with a clear Tamil-Malayalam substratum in the language, which also appears in place names, kinship terms, poetry, dance, and religious beliefs. Malabari seafaring culture led to the settlement of the Islands by Malayali seafarers. The earliest written history of the Maldives was marked by the arrival of Sinhalese people in Sri Lanka and the Maldives (*Mahiladvipika*) circa 543 to 483 BC, as reported in the *Mahavamsa*. Their settlement marks a significant change in demographics and the development of the Indo-Aryan language *Dhivehi* language. === Buddhist period === Despite being just mentioned briefly in most history books, the 1,400-year-long Buddhist period has a foundational importance in the history of the Maldives. It was during this period that the culture of the Maldives as we now know it both developed and flourished. The Maldivian language, the first Maldivian scripts, the architecture, the ruling institutions, the customs and manners of the Maldivians originated at the time when the Maldives were a Buddhist kingdom. Buddhism probably spread to the Maldives in the 3rd century BC at the time of Emperor Ashoka's expansion, and became the dominant religion of the people of the Maldives until the 12th century AD. The ancient Maldivian Kings promoted Buddhism, and the first Maldivian writings and artistic achievements, in the form of highly developed sculpture and architecture, are from that period. Nearly all archaeological remains in the Maldives are from Buddhist stupas and monasteries, and all artifacts found to date display characteristic Buddhist iconography. Buddhist (and Hindu) temples were *Mandala* shaped, they are oriented according to the four cardinal points, the main gate being towards the east. Local historian Hassan Ahmed Maniku counted as many as 59 islands with Buddhist archaeological sites in a provisional list he published in 1990. === Islamic period === The importance of the Somalis as traders in the Indian Ocean by the 12th century may partly explain why the last Buddhist king of Maldives *Dhovemi* converted to Islam in the year 1153 (or 1193), adopting the Muslim title of Sultan Muhammad al Adil, and initiating a series of six Islamic dynasties that lasted until 1932 when the

sultanate became elective. The formal title of the Sultan up to 1965 was, Sultan of Land and Sea, Lord of the twelve-thousand islands and Sultan of the Maldives which came with the style Highness. The person who was responsible for converting the Maldivian population to Islam was Yusuf bin Ahmad al-Kawneyn a very famous Somali saint. In the Maldives, he is called Saint Abu Barakat al Barbari ("blessed father of Somalia") and whose religious name was Shaykh Yusuf al Kawneyn. He is also credited with spreading Islam in the islands, establishing the Hukuru Miskiiy Mosque, and converting the Maldivian population into Islam. Ibn Batuta states the Maldivian king was converted by Abu Al Barakat Al Berber ("blessed father of Somalia"). The Shaikh reportedly converted the islands into Islam by convincing the local King, Sultan Mohammed Al Adil, after having subdued Ranna Maari, a demon coming from the sea. The Somalis also established the Hilaalee dynasty in the Maldivian islands where it became a colony under Ajuran Empire and ruled by a famous Somali Viceroy from Mogadishu called Abd al-Aziz of Mogadishu. The presence and high position of Abd al-Aziz in this region highlights the close connections between medieval Maldives and the Somali seamen from Mogadishu sailing the Indian Ocean. They supplied Maldivian traders with exotic animals and musk, and contributed to the ethnogenesis of the Maldivian population. In 1346, Abd al-Aziz welcomed Ibn Battuta at his court and entertained him before giving him a barque to continue his journey. Middle Eastern seafarers had just begun to take over the Indian Ocean trade routes in the 10th century and found Maldives to be an important link in those routes as the first landfall for traders from Basra sailing to Southeast Asia. Trade involved mainly cowrie shells – widely used as a form of currency throughout Asia and parts of the East African coast – and coir fiber. The Bengal Sultanate, where cowrie shells were used as legal tender, was one of the principal trading partners of the Maldives. The Bengal-Maldives cowry shell trade was the largest shell currency trade network in history. The other essential product of the Maldives was coir, the fibre of the dried coconut husk, resistant to saltwater. It stitched together and rigged the dhows that plied the Indian Ocean. Maldivian coir was exported to Sindh, China, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf. === Colonial period === In 1558 the Portuguese established a small garrison with a Viador (Viyazoru), or overseer of a factory (trading post) in the Maldives, which they administered from their main colony in Goa. Their attempts to impose Christianity provoked a local revolt led by Muhammad Thakurufaanu Al-Azam and his two brothers, that fifteen years later drove the Portuguese out of Maldives. This event is now commemorated as National Day. In the mid-17th century, the Dutch, who had replaced the Portuguese as the dominant power in Ceylon, established hegemony over Maldivian affairs without involving themselves directly in local matters, which were governed according to centuries-old Islamic customs. The British expelled the Dutch from Ceylon in 1796 and included Maldives as a British protected area. The status of Maldives as a British protectorate was officially recorded in an 1887 agreement in which the sultan accepted British influence over Maldivian external relations and defence while retaining home rule, which continued to be regulated by Muslim traditional institutions in exchange for an annual tribute. The status of the islands was akin to other British protectorates in the Indian Ocean region, including Zanzibar and the Trucial States. In the British period the Sultan's powers were taken over by the Chief Minister, much to the chagrin of the British Governor-General who continued to deal with the ineffectual Sultan. Consequently, Britain encouraged the development of a constitutional monarchy, and the first Constitution was proclaimed in 1932. However, the new arrangements favoured neither the aging Sultan nor the wily Chief Minister, but rather a young crop of British-educated reformists. As a result, angry mobs were instigated against the Constitution which was publicly torn up. Maldives remained a British crown protectorate until 1953 when the sultanate was suspended and the First Republic was declared under the short-lived presidency of Muhammad Amin Didi. While serving as prime minister during the 1940s, Didi nationalized the fish export industry. As president he is remembered as a reformer of the education system and a promoter of women's rights. Muslim conservatives in Malé eventually ousted his government, and during a riot over food shortages, Didi was beaten by a mob and died on a nearby island. Beginning in the 1950s, the political history in Maldives was largely influenced by the British military presence in the islands. In 1954 the restoration of the sultanate perpetuated the rule of the past. Two years later, the United Kingdom obtained permission to reestablish its wartime RAF Gan airfield in the southernmost Addu Atoll, employing hundreds of locals. In 1957, however, the new prime minister, Ibrahim Nasir, called for a review of the agreement. Nasir was challenged in 1959 by a local secessionist movement in the three southernmost atolls that benefited economically from the British presence on Gan. This group cut ties with the Maldives government and formed an independent state, the United Suvadive Republic with Abdullah Afif as president and Hithadhoo as capital. One year later the Suvadive republic was scrapped after Nasir sent gunboats from Malé with government police, and Abdulla Afif went into exile. Meanwhile, in

1960 the Maldives had allowed the United Kingdom to continue to use both the Gan and the Hitaddu facilities for a thirty-year period, with the payment of £750,000 over the period of 1960 to 1965 for the purpose of Maldives' economic development. The base was closed in 1976 as part of the larger British withdrawal of permanently stationed forces 'East of Suez'. === Independence and republic === In line with the broader British policy of decolonisation on 26 July 1965 an agreement was signed on behalf of His Majesty the Sultan by Ibrahim Nasir Rannabandeyri Kilegefan, Prime Minister, and on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen by Sir Michael Walker, British Ambassador designate to the Maldivian Islands, which ended the British responsibility for the defence and external affairs of the Maldives. The islands thus achieved full political independence, with the ceremony taking place at the British High Commissioner's Residence in Colombo. After this, the sultanate continued for another three years under Muhammad Fareed Didi, who declared himself King rather than Sultan. On 15 November 1967, a vote was taken in parliament to decide whether the Maldives should continue as a constitutional monarchy or become a republic. Of the 44 members of parliament, forty voted in favour of a republic. On 15 March 1968, a national referendum was held on the question, and 93.34% of those taking part voted in favour of establishing a republic. The republic was declared on 11 November 1968, thus ending the 853-year-old monarchy, which was replaced by a republic under the presidency of Ibrahim Nasir. As the King had held little real power, this was seen as a cosmetic change and required few alterations in the structures of government. Tourism began to be developed on the archipelago by the beginning of the 1970s. The first resort in the Maldives was Kurumba Maldives which welcomed the first guests on 3 October 1972. The first accurate census was held in December 1977 and showed 142,832 persons residing in Maldives. Political infighting during the '70s between Nasir's faction and other political figures led to the 1975 arrest and exile of elected prime minister Ahmed Zaki to a remote atoll. Economic decline followed the closure of the British airfield at Gan and the collapse of the market for dried fish, an important export. With support for his administration faltering, Nasir fled to Singapore in 1978, with millions of dollars from the treasury. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom began his 30-year role as President in 1978, winning six consecutive elections without opposition. His election was seen as ushering in a period of political stability and economic development in view of Gayoom's priority to develop the poorer islands. Tourism flourished and increased foreign contact spurred development. However, Gayoom's rule was controversial, with some critics saying Gayoom was an autocrat who quelled dissent by limiting freedoms and political favouritism. A series of coup attempts (in 1980, 1983, and 1988) by Nasir supporters and business interests tried to topple the government without success. While the first two attempts met with little success, the 1988 coup attempt involved a roughly 80-person mercenary force of the PLOTE who seized the airport and caused Gayoom to flee from house to house until the intervention of 1600 Indian troops airlifted into Malé restored order. A November 1988 coup was headed by Muhammadu Ibrahim Lutfee, a small-businessman. On the night of 3 November 1988, the Indian Air Force airlifted a parachute battalion group from Agra and flew them over 2,000 kilometres (1,200 mi) to the Maldives. The Indian paratroopers landed at Hulule and secured the airfield and restored the government rule at Malé within hours. The brief operation, labelled Operation Cactus, also involved the Indian Navy. === 21st century === On 26 December 2004, following the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, the Maldives were devastated by a tsunami. Only nine islands were reported to have escaped any flooding, while fifty-seven islands faced serious damage to critical infrastructure, fourteen islands had to be totally evacuated, and six islands were destroyed. A further twenty-one resort islands were forced to close because of tsunami damage. The total damage was estimated at more than US\$400 million, or some 62% of the GDP. 102 Maldivians and 6 foreigners reportedly died in the tsunami. The destructive impact of the waves on the low-lying islands was mitigated by the fact there was no continental shelf or land mass upon which the waves could gain height. The tallest waves were reported to be 14 feet (4.3 m) high. During the later part of Gayoom's rule, independent political movements emerged in Maldives, which challenged the then-ruling Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (Maldivian People's Party, MPP) and demanded democratic reform. The dissident journalist and activist Mohamed Nasheed founded the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) in 2003 and pressured Gayoom into allowing gradual political reforms. In 2008 a new constitution was approved and the first direct presidential elections occurred, which were won by Mohamed Nasheed in the second round. His administration faced many challenges, including the huge debt left by the previous government, the economic downturn following the 2004 tsunami, overspending (by means of overprinting of local currency rufiyaa), unemployment, corruption, and increasing drug use. Taxation on goods was imposed for the first time in the country, and import duties were reduced in many goods and services. Social welfare benefits were given to those aged 65 years or older, single parents, and those with special

needs. Social and political unrest grew in late 2011, following opposition campaigns in the name of protecting Islam. Nasheed controversially resigned from office after large number of police and army mutinied in February 2012. Nasheed's vice president, Mohammed Waheed Hassan, was sworn in as President. Nasheed was later arrested, convicted of terrorism, and sentenced to 13 years. The trial was widely seen as flawed and political. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called for Nasheed's immediate release. The elections in late 2013 were highly contested. Former president Mohammed Nasheed won the most votes in the first round, but the Supreme Court annulled it despite the positive assessment of international election observers. In the re-run vote Abdulla Yameen, half-brother of the former president Gayoom, assumed the presidency. Yameen introduced increased engagement with China, and promoted a policy of connecting Islam with anti-Western rhetoric. Yameen survived an assassination attempt in late 2015. Vice president Ahmed Adeeab was later arrested together with 17 supporters for "public order offences" and the government instituted a broader crackdown against political dissent. A state of emergency was later declared ahead of a planned anti-government rally, and the people's Majlis accelerated the removal of Vice president Ahmed Adeeab. Though the popular image of the Maldives is that of a holiday paradise, its radicalised youths are enlisting in significant numbers to fight for ISIL militants in the Middle East. On February 3, 2018, Parliament dissolved and the military occupied the capital. On February 5, the supreme court of Maldives released three imprisoned opposition leaders, including former President Mohammed Nasheed. The court also provided relief to 12 ministers who had been removed from President Abdullah Yameen's ruling party. Yameen refused to comply with the court order and imposed a state of emergency to last for 15 days. Protesters demonstrated on the streets against President Abdullah Yameen after the announcement of the emergency.

== Geography == The Maldives consists of 1,192 coral islands grouped in a double chain of 26 atolls, along the north-south direction, spread over roughly 90,000 square kilometres (35,000 sq mi), making this one of the world's most dispersed countries. It lies between latitudes 1°S and 8°N, and longitudes 72° and 74°E. The atolls are composed of live coral reefs and sand bars, situated atop a submarine ridge 960 kilometres (600 mi) long that rises abruptly from the depths of the Indian Ocean and runs north to south. Only near the southern end of this natural coral barricade do two open passages permit safe ship navigation from one side of the Indian Ocean to the other through the territorial waters of Maldives. For administrative purposes, the Maldivian government organised these atolls into 21 administrative divisions. The largest island of Maldives is Gan, which belongs to Laamu Atoll or Hahdhummathi Maldives. In Addu Atoll, the westernmost islands are connected by roads over the reef (collectively called Link Road) and the total length of the road is 14 km (9 mi). Maldives is the lowest country in the world, with maximum and average natural ground levels of only 2.4 metres (7 ft 10 in) and 1.5 metres (4 ft 11 in) above sea level, respectively. In areas where construction exists, however, this has been increased to several metres. More than 80 per cent of the country's land is composed of coral islands which rise less than one metre above sea level. As a result, the Maldives are at high risk of being submerged due to rising sea levels. The UN's environmental panel has warned that, at current rates, sea level rise would be high enough to make the Maldives uninhabitable by 2100.

=== Protected areas of Maldives === Protected areas of Maldives are administrated by Ministry of Environment and Energy and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Maldives. There are 31 protected areas in Maldives.

=== Climate === The Maldives has a tropical monsoon climate (Am) under the Köppen climate classification, which is affected by the large landmass of South Asia to the north. The presence of this landmass causes differential heating of land and water. These factors set off a rush of moisture-rich air from the Indian Ocean over South Asia, resulting in the southwest monsoon. Two seasons dominate Maldives' weather: the dry season associated with the winter northeastern monsoon and the rainy season which brings strong winds and storms. The shift from the dry northeast monsoon to the moist southwest monsoon occurs during April and May. During this period, the southwest winds contribute to the formation of the southwest monsoon, which reaches Maldives in the beginning of June and lasts until the end of August. However, the weather patterns of Maldives do not always conform to the monsoon patterns of South Asia. The annual rainfall averages 254 centimetres (100 in) in the north and 381 centimetres (150 in) in the south. The monsoonal influence is greater in the north of the Maldives than in the south, more influenced by the equatorial currents.

=== Environmental issues === The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2007 report predicted the upper limit of the sea level rises will be 59 centimetres (23 in) by 2100, which means that most of the republic's 200 inhabited islands may need to be abandoned. One study appears to show that the sea level in the Maldives dropped 20–30 centimetres (8–12 in) throughout the 1970s and '80s, although later studies failed to back this up. The observed rate of sea level rise is only 1.7–1.8

millimetres per year. According to former Maldivian president Mohamed Nasheed, the Maldives are ranked the third most endangered nation due to flooding from climate change. In March and April 2012, Nasheed stated, "If carbon emissions were to stop today, the planet would not see a difference for 60 to 70 years." "If carbon emissions continue at the rate they are climbing today, my country will be under water in seven years." He called for more climate change mitigation action while on the American television shows *The Daily Show* and *The Late Show with David Letterman*. This opinion was disputed in 2012, when the next President said: "The good news is that Maldives is not about to disappear....on the basis of technical and scientific information that we have, that we will be able to manage climate change in the Maldives and prolong the life for the islands and for our life on these islands." In November 2008, President Mohamed Nasheed announced plans to look into purchasing new land in India, Sri Lanka, and Australia because of his concerns about global warming, and the possibility of much of the islands being inundated with water from rising sea levels. The purchase of land will be made from a fund generated by tourism. The President has explained his intentions: "We do not want to leave the Maldives, but we also do not want to be climate refugees living in tents for decades". On 22 April 2008, then President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom pleaded for a cut in global greenhouse gas emissions, warning that rising sea levels could submerge the island nation of Maldives. By 2020, Maldives plans to eliminate or offset all of its greenhouse gas emissions. At the 2009 International Climate Talks, President Mohamed Nasheed explained that: For us swearing off fossil fuels is not only the right thing to do, it is in our economic self-interest... Pioneering countries will free themselves from the unpredictable price of foreign oil; they will capitalise on the new green economy of the future, and they will enhance their moral standing giving them greater political influence on the world stage. Other environmental issues include bad waste disposal and beach theft. Although the Maldives are kept relatively pristine and little litter can be found on the islands, no good waste disposal sites exist. Most trash from Male and other resorts is simply dumped at Thilafushi. === Marine ecosystem === The Maldives have a range of different habitats including deep sea, shallow coast, and reef ecosystems, fringing mangroves, wetlands and dry land. There are 187 species of coral forming the coral reefs. This area of the Indian Ocean, alone, houses 1100 species of fish, 5 species of sea turtle, 21 species of whale and dolphin, 400 species of mollusc, and 83 species of echinoderms. The area is also populated by a number of crustacean species: 120 copepod, 15 amphipod, as well as more than 145 crab and 48 shrimp species. Among the many marine families represented are Pufferfish, Fusiliers, Jackfish, Lionfish, Oriental Sweetlips, reef sharks, Groupers, Eels, Snappers, Bannerfish, Batfish, Humphead Wrasse, Spotted Eagle Rays, Scorpionfish, Lobsters, Nudibranchs, Angelfish, Butterflyfish, Squirrelfish, Soldierfish, Glassfish, Surgeonfish, Unicornfish, Triggerfish, Napoleon wrasses, and Barracudas. These coral reefs are home to a variety of marine ecosystems that vary from planktonic organisms to whale sharks. Sponges have gained importance as five species have displayed anti-tumor and anti-cancer properties. In 1998, sea-temperature warming of as much as 5 °C (9.0 °F) due to a single El Niño phenomenon event caused coral bleaching, killing two-thirds of the nation's coral reefs. In an effort to induce the regrowth of the reefs, scientists placed electrified cones anywhere from 20–60 feet (6.1–18.3 m) below the surface to provide a substrate for larval coral attachment. In 2004, scientists witnessed corals regenerating. Corals began to eject pink-orange eggs and sperm. The growth of these electrified corals was five times faster than untreated corals. Scientist Azeez Hakim stated: before 1998, we never thought that this reef would die. We had always taken for granted that these animals would be there, that this reef would be there forever. El Niño gave us a wake-up call that these things are not going to be there for ever. Not only this, they also act as a natural barrier against the tropical storms, floods and tsunamis. Seaweeds grow on the skeletons of dead coral. Again, in 2016, the coral reefs of the Maldives experienced a severe bleaching incident. Up to 95% of coral around some islands have died, and, even after six months, 100% of young coral transplants died. The surface water temperatures reached an all-time high in 2016, at 31 degrees Celsius in May. Recent scientific studies suggest that the faunistic composition can vary greatly between neighbour atolls, especially in terms of benthic fauna. Differences in terms of fishing pressure (including poaching) could be the cause. == Government == Maldives is a presidential republic, with the President as head of government and head of state. The President heads the executive branch and appoints the cabinet which is approved by the People's Majlis (Parliament). Following the introduction of a new constitution in 2008, direct elections for the President take place every five years, with a limit of two terms in office for any individual. The current President is Abdulla Yameen. Members of the unicameral Majlis serve five-year terms, with the total number of members determined by atoll populations. At the 2009 election, 77 members were elected. The People's Majlis, located in Male, houses members from all

over the country. The republican constitution came into force in 1968, and was amended in 1970, 1972, and 1975. On 27 November 1997 it was replaced by another Constitution assented to by the President Gayoom. This Constitution came into force on 1 January 1998. All stated that the president was the Head of State, Head of Government and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and the Police of the Maldives. A third Constitution was ratified in 2008, which separated the judiciary from the head of state. In 2018, tensions with opposition and subsequent crackdown was termed as an "Assault on democracy" by the UN Human Rights chief. === Law === According to the Constitution of Maldives, "the judges are independent, and subject only to the Constitution and the law. When deciding matters on which the Constitution or the law is silent, judges must consider Islamic Shari'ah". Article 15 of the Act Number 1/81 (Penal Code) gives provision for hudud punishments. Article 156 of the constitution states that law includes the norms and provisions of sharia. Islam is the official religion of the Maldives and open practice of any other religion is forbidden and liable to prosecution. Article 2 of the revised constitution says that the republic "is based on the principles of Islam". Article nine says that "a non-Muslim may not become a citizen"; article ten says that "no law contrary to any principle of Islam can be applied". Article nineteen states that "citizens are free to participate in or carry out any activity that is not expressly prohibited by sharia [Islamic law] or by the law". The requirement to adhere to a particular religion and prohibition of public worship following other religions is contrary to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Maldives has recently become party and was addressed in Maldives' reservation in adhering to the Covenant claiming that "The application of the principles set out in Article 18 of the Covenant shall be without prejudice to the Constitution of the Republic of the Maldives." === Human rights === Human rights in the Maldives is a contentious issue. In its 2011 Freedom in the World report, Freedom House declared the Maldives "Partly Free", claiming a reform process which had made headway in 2009 and 2010 had stalled. The United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor claims in their 2012 report on human rights practices in the country that the most significant problems are corruption, lack of religious freedom, and abuse and unequal treatment of women. In February 2013, the court sentenced a 15-year-old rape victim to 100 lashes and 8 months of house arrest for having had extra-marital relations. The conviction was based on the confession of the girl shortly after being raped by her stepfather. Same-sex relations are illegal in the Maldives. === Foreign relations === Since 1996, the Maldives has been the official progress monitor of the Indian Ocean Commission. In 2002, the Maldives began to express interest in the commission but as of 2008 had not applied for membership. Maldives' interest relates to its identity as a small island state, especially economic development and environmental preservation, and its desire for closer relations with France, a main actor in the IOC region. The Maldives is a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The republic joined the Commonwealth in 1982, some 17 years after gaining independence from the United Kingdom. In October 2016, Maldives announced its withdrawal from the Commonwealth in protest at allegations of human rights abuse and failing democracy. The Maldives enjoys close ties with Commonwealth members Seychelles and Mauritius. The Maldives and Comoros are also both members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. === Military === The Maldives National Defence Force is the combined security organisation responsible for defending the security and sovereignty of the Maldives, having the primary task of being responsible for attending to all internal and external security needs of the Maldives, including the protection of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the maintenance of peace and security. The MNDF component branches are the Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Special Forces, Service Corps and the Corps of Engineers. As a water-bound nation much of the security concerns lie at sea. Almost 99% of the country is covered by sea and the remaining 1% land is scattered over an area of 800 km (497 mi) x 120 km (75 mi), with the largest island being not more than 8 km² (3 sq mi). Therefore, the duties assigned to the MNDF of maintaining surveillance over Maldives' waters and providing protection against foreign intruders poaching in the EEZ and territorial waters, are immense tasks from both logistical and economic viewpoints. The Coast Guard plays a vital role in carrying out these functions. To provide timely security its patrol boats are stationed at various MNDF Regional Headquarters. The Coast Guard is also assigned to respond to the maritime distress calls and to conduct search and rescue operations in a timely manner. Maritime pollution control exercises are conducted regularly on an annual basis for familiarisation and handling of such hazardous situations. === Administrative divisions === The Maldives has twenty-six natural atolls and few island groups on isolated reefs, all of which have been divided into twenty-one administrative divisions (19 administrative atolls and cities of Malé and Addu). Each atoll is administered by an elected Atoll Council. The islands are administered by

an elected Island Council. Between 2008 and 2010 the Maldives had 7 provinces each consisting of the following administrative divisions (the capital Malé is its own administrative division): Mathi-Uthuru Province; consists of Haa Alif Atoll, Haa Dhaalu Atoll and Shaviyani Atoll. Uthuru Province; consists of Noonu Atoll, Raa Atoll, Baa Atoll and Lhaviyani Atoll. Medhu-Uthuru Province; consists of Kaafu Atoll, Alifu Alifu Atoll, Alifu Dhaalu Atoll and Vaavu Atoll. Medhu Province; consists of Meemu Atoll, Faafu Atoll and Dhaalu Atoll. Medhu-Dhekunu Province; consists of Thaa Atoll and Laamu Atoll. Mathi-Dhekunu Province; consists of Gaafu Alifu Atoll and Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll. Dhekunu Province; consists of Gnaviyani Atoll and Addu City. In addition to a name, every administrative division is identified by the Maldivian code letters, such as "Haa Alif" for Thiladhunmati Uthuruburi (Thiladhunmathi North); and by a Latin code letter. The first corresponds to the geographical Maldivian name of the atoll; the second is a code adopted for convenience. As there are certain islands in different atolls that have the same name, for administrative purposes this code is quoted before the name of the island, for example: Baa Funadhoo, Kaafu Funadhoo, Gaafu-Alifu Funadhoo. Since most Atolls have very long geographical names it is also used whenever the long name is inconvenient, for example in the atoll website names. The introduction of code-letter names has been a source of much puzzlement and misunderstandings, especially among foreigners. Many people have come to think that the code-letter of the administrative atoll is its new name and that it has replaced its geographical name. Under such circumstances it is hard to know which is the correct name to use. == Economy == In ancient times the Maldives were renowned for cowry shells, coir rope, dried tuna fish (Maldivian Fish), ambergris (Maavaharu), and coco de mer (Tavakkaashi). Local and foreign trading ships used to load these products in Sri Lanka and transport them to other harbours in the Indian Ocean. Historically Maldives provided enormous quantities of cowry shells, an international currency of the early ages. From the 2nd century AD the islands were known as the 'Money Isles' by the Arabs. Monetaria moneta were used for centuries as a currency in Africa, and huge amounts of Maldivian cowries were introduced into Africa by western nations during the period of slave trade. The cowry is now the symbol of the Maldives Monetary Authority. The Maldivian government began an economic reform programme in 1989, initially by lifting import quotas and opening some exports to the private sector. Subsequently, it has liberalised regulations to allow more foreign investment. Real GDP growth averaged over 7.5% per year for more than a decade. Today, the Maldives' largest industry is tourism, accounting for 28% of GDP and more than 60% of the Maldives' foreign exchange receipts. Fishing is the second leading sector. The Maldivian economy is to a large degree based on tourism. In late December 2004, the major tsunami left more than 100 dead, 12,000 displaced, and property damage exceeding \$400 million. As a result of the tsunami, the GDP contracted by about 3.6% in 2005. A rebound in tourism, post-tsunami reconstruction, and development of new resorts helped the economy recover quickly and showed an 18% increase in 2006. 2013 estimates show Maldivians enjoy the highest GDP (PPP) per capita \$11,900 (2013 est) among south Asian countries. Agriculture and manufacturing continue to play a lesser role in the economy, constrained by the limited availability of cultivable land and the shortage of domestic labour. Tourism gave a major boost to the country's fledgling traditional cottage industries such as mat weaving, lacquer work, handicraft, and coir rope making. New industries that have since emerged include printing, production of PVC pipes, brick making, marine engine repairs, bottling of aerated water, and garment production. === Tourism === The Maldives remained largely unknown to tourists until the early 1970s. Only 185 islands are home to its 300,000 inhabitants. The other islands are used entirely for economic purposes, of which tourism and agriculture are the most dominant. Tourism accounts for 28% of the GDP and more than 60% of the Maldives' foreign exchange receipts. Over 90% of government tax revenue comes from import duties and tourism-related taxes. The development of tourism fostered the overall growth of the country's economy. It created direct and indirect employment and income generation opportunities in other related industries. The first tourist resorts were opened in 1972 with Bandos island resort and Kurumba Village (the current name is Kurumba Maldives), which transformed the Maldives economy. According to the Ministry of Tourism, the emergence of tourism in 1972 transformed the economy, moving rapidly from dependence on fisheries to tourism. In just three and a half decades, the industry became the main source of income. Tourism was also the country's biggest foreign currency earner and the single largest contributor to the GDP. As of 2008, 89 resorts in the Maldives offered over 17,000 beds and hosted over 600,000 tourists annually. The number of resorts increased from 2 to 92 between 1972 and 2007. As of 2007, over 8,380,000 tourists had visited Maldives. Visitors to the Maldives do not need to apply for a visa pre-arrival, regardless of their country of origin, provided they have a valid passport, proof of onward travel, and the money to be self-sufficient while in the country. Most visitors arrive at Malé International

Airport, on Hulhulé Island, adjacent to the capital Malé. The airport is served by flights to and from India, Sri Lanka, Doha, Dubai, Singapore, Istanbul, and major airports in South-East Asia, as well as charters from Europe. Gan Airport, on the southern atoll of Addu, also serves an international flight to Milan several times a week. British Airways offers direct flights to the Maldives around 2–3 times per week. === Fishing industry === For many centuries the Maldivian economy was entirely dependent on fishing and other marine products. Fishing remains the main occupation of the people and the government gives priority to the fisheries sector. The mechanisation of the traditional fishing boat called dhoni in 1974 was a major milestone in the development of the fisheries industry. A fish canning plant was installed on Felivaru in 1977, as a joint venture with a Japanese firm. In 1979, a Fisheries Advisory Board was set up with the mandate of advising the government on policy guidelines for the overall development of the fisheries sector. Manpower development programmes began in the early 1980s, and fisheries education was incorporated into the school curriculum. Fish aggregating devices and navigational aids were located at various strategic points. Moreover, the opening up of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Maldives for fisheries has further enhanced the growth of the fisheries sector. As of 2010, fisheries contributed over 15% of the country's GDP and engaged about 30% of the country's work force. Fisheries were also the second-largest foreign exchange earner after tourism. == Demographics == The largest ethnic group are Dhivehis, i.e. the Maldivians, native to the historic region of the Maldivian Islands comprising today's Republic of Maldives and the island of Minicoy in Union territory of Lakshadweep, India. They share the same culture and speak the Dhivehi language. They are principally an Indo-Aryan people, closely related to the Sinhalese and having traces of Middle Eastern, South Asian, Austronesian and African genes in the population. In the past there was also a small Tamil population known as the Giraavaru people. This group have now been almost completely absorbed into the larger Maldivian society but were once native to the island of Giraavaru (Kaafu Atoll). This island was evacuated in 1968 due to heavy erosion of the island. Some social stratification exists on the islands. It is not rigid, since rank is based on varied factors, including occupation, wealth, Islamic virtue, and family ties. Instead of a complex caste system, there was merely a distinction between noble (b^hulhu) and common people in the Maldives. Members of the social elite are concentrated in Malé. The population doubled by 1978, and the population growth rate peaked at 3.4% in 1985. At the 2006 census, the population had reached 298,968, although the census in 2000 showed that the population growth rate had declined to 1.9%. Life expectancy at birth stood at 46 years in 1978, and later rose to 72. Infant mortality has declined from 12.7% in 1977 to 1.2% today, and adult literacy reached 99%. Combined school enrolment reached the high 90s. The population was projected to have reached 317,280 in 2010. As of April 2008, more than 70,000 foreign employees, along with 33,000 illegal immigrants, comprised more than one third of the Maldivian population.. There are 40,000 Bangladeshis in the Maldives, making them the largest group of foreigners working in that country. Other immigrants include Filipinos in the Maldives as well as various Western expatriates. === Religion === After the long Buddhist period of Maldivian history, Muslim traders introduced Islam. Maldivians converted to Islam by the mid-12th century. The islands have had a long history of Sufi orders, as can be seen in the history of the country such as the building of tombs. They were used until as recently as the 1980s for seeking the help of buried saints. They can be seen next to some old mosques and are considered a part of Maldives's cultural heritage. Other aspects of tassawuf, such as ritualised dhikr ceremonies called Maul^hdu (Mawlid)—the liturgy of which included recitations and certain supplications in a melodical tone—existed until very recent times. These Maul^hdu festivals were held in ornate tents specially built for the occasion. At present Islam is the official religion of the entire population, as adherence to it is required for citizenship. According to Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta, the person responsible for this conversion was a Sunni Muslim visitor named Abu al-Barakat, sailing from Morocco. He is also referred to as Tabrizugefaanu. His venerated tomb now stands on the grounds of the Friday Mosque, or Hukuru Miskiy, in Malé. Built in 1656, this is the country's oldest mosque. === Languages === The official and common language is Dhivehi, an Indo-Aryan language having some similarities with Elu, the ancient Sinhalese language. The first known script used to write Dhivehi is Eveyla akuru script which is found in historical recording of kings (raadhaivalhi). Later a script called Dhives akuru was used for a long period. The present-day script is called Thaana and is written from right to left. Thaana is said to have been introduced by the reign of Mohamed Thakurufaanu. English is widely spoken by the locals of Maldives. === Population by locality === == Culture == Since the 12th century AD there were also influences from Arabia in the language and culture of the Maldives because of the conversion to Islam and its location as a crossroads in the central Indian Ocean. This was due to the long trading history between the far east and the middle east. Somali travellers

discovered the island for gold in the 13th century, before the Portuguese. Their brief stay later ended in a bloody conflict known by the Somalis as "Dagaal Diig Badaaney" in 1424. However, unlike the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka and most of the Arabs, Africans and Europeans whose influence can be seen in borrow-words, material culture, and the diversity of Maldivian phenotype, Maldivians do not have the highly embedded patriarchal codes of honour, purity, corporate marriage, and sedentary private property that are typical of places where agriculture is the key form of subsistence and social relations have been built, historically, around tribute taking. Reflective of this is the fact that the Maldives has had the highest national divorce rate in the world for many decades. This, it is hypothesised, is due to a combination of liberal Islamic rules about divorce and the relatively loose marital bonds that have been identified as common in non- and semi-sedentary peoples without a history of fully developed agrarian property and kinship relations. == Transportation == Velana International Airport is the principal gateway to the Maldives. International travel is available on a number of major airlines. Two Maldives based airlines also operate international flights. Privately owned MEGA Maldives Airlines has Boeing 737 and 767 aircraft and operates frequent services to Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. Government owned Island Aviation Services (branded as Maldivian) operates to nearly all Maldives domestic airports with several Bombardier Dash 8 aircraft and one A320 with international service to Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram, India, and Dhaka, Bangladesh. In Maldives there are three main ways to travel between islands: by domestic flight, by seaplane or by boat. For several years there were two seaplane companies operating: TMA (Trans Maldivian Airways and Maldivian Air Taxi, but these merged in 2013 under the name TMA. The seaplane fleet is entirely made up of DHC-6 Twin Otters. There is also another airline, Flyme, which operates using ATR planes to domestic airports, principally Maamagili and some others. The typical Maldivian boat is called a dhoni. Depending on the distance of the destination island from the airport, resorts organise domestic flight plus boat transfers, seaplane flights directly to the resort island jetty, or speedboat trips for their guests. There are also locally run ferries using large dhoni boats. Speedboats and seaplanes tend to be more expensive, while travel by dhoni, although slower, is relatively cheaper and convenient. == Education == The Maldives National University is one of the country's three institutions of higher education. Its mission statement is as follows: To create, discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge that are necessary to enhance the lives and livelihoods of people and essential for the cultural, social and economic development of the society so that this nation shall remain free and Islamic forever. In 1973, the Allied Health Services Training Centre (the forerunner of the Faculty of Health Sciences) was established by the Ministry of Health. The Vocational Training Centre was established in 1974, providing training for mechanical and electrical trades. In 1984, the Institute for Teacher Education was created and the School of Hotel and Catering Services was established in 1987 to provide trained personnel for the tourist industry. In 1991, the Institute of Management and Administration was created to train staff for public and private services. In 1998, the Maldives College of Higher Education was founded. The Institute of Shar'ah and Law was founded in January 1999. In 2000 the college launched its first degree programme: Bachelor of Arts. On 17 January 2011 the Maldives National University Act was passed by the President of the Maldives; The Maldives National University was named on 15 February 2011. == See also == 27596 Maldives, a minor planet named after the nation Commonwealth of Nations Desalination in the Maldives Index of Maldives-related articles List of island countries Outline of Maldives == References == Further reading == Divehiraajjege J■graf■ge Vanavaru. Muhammadu Ibrahim Lutfee. G.S■san■. Malé 1999. H. C. P. Bell, The Maldive Islands, An account of the Physical Features, History, Inhabitants, Productions and Trade. Colombo 1883, ISBN 81-206-1222-1. H.C.P. 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