

Maldives Dive Trip Notes

Dec 19-28, 2022, Emperor Explorer Liveaboard

Rev 0

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 Best Time to Go

Maldives “season” is December through March. November and April are OK, but weather starts getting squally in May and June it’s not that great. (SW monsoon season).

However, the dive boats do run year round, so it is theoretically diveable all year.

1.1.2 Time Zone

Maldives is +5 UTC, so 7am Maldives time is 9pm USA East Coast, 6pm USA West Coast, 2am in London, and 10am in Malaysia.

1.1.3 Money

There were 2 ATM’s in the airport. I had no trouble getting money out with my US debit card. Exchange rate is around 15 MVR per USD.

1.1.4 Cell Sims

Our dive boat has wifi, but charges I think \$25 USD for only 5GB (this would likely be enough if you don’t go wild uploading stuff).

Arriving at 9pm, the only cell phone sims we saw for sale were Ooredoo. Big signs everywhere saying they were the best sims for tourists, though it wasn’t the one recommended when I’d been doing research online ahead of time. We bought an Ooredoo sim for \$35 for 17GB good for 30 days (same price as the one I’d researched).

There was a line at the counter of people waiting to have the sim card put in and activated. We were tired and I was impatient, so I just took the sim and activated it myself. It seemed to work ok the morning we were walking around Hulhumale.

But later, there was a problem with our reception (Hot Spot from my cell to my laptop worked, but most things on my cell did not (only Whatsapp worked), nothing Google-oriented worked. I contacted Customer Support via the Ooredoo chat, and they had me clear the “proxy” settings in the APN settings, and everything started working on my cell phone. Another diver mentioned they were having problems too, but didn’t know how to get to the APN settings on their mifi device.

We had decent reception in the central Maldives (North and South Male, and North and South Ari), except at Felidhe Atoll (just south of South Male Atoll). We had really weak connection at the very north end, and then nothing as we moved further south.

1.1.5 The Emperor Explorer Dive Boat

This is a really nice dive boat—new in 2019. It is well kept and well run. The Emperor is essentially a floating hotel, and is accompanied by a 24 person dive boat, everywhere we go. All the dive gear is set up on the dive boat on Day 1, and tanks are filled with Nitrox in place (no changing your BC from one tank to another). We had 4 dive guides split across 19 divers. So 5-6 people per guide. After the first dive, they tried to pair us up with like divers (accounting for language, diving experience and air consumption, etc).



Emperor Explorer & Accompanying Dhoni "Leaf"

Features we liked beyond the standard liveaboard: Free Nitrox. 1 free glass of wine at dinner. But no free internet. (\$25 USD for 5GB). They had a cash bar at fairly upscale bar prices. Aircon in every room and hot water showers.

Our liveaboard draws 3.5m (about 12 ft), so anywhere they went, a cruising monohull could go. The dhoni (6m dive boat) draws about 4 ft, but never goes in water that shallow.



Our Dhoni coming back from a dive

1.1.6 Currents

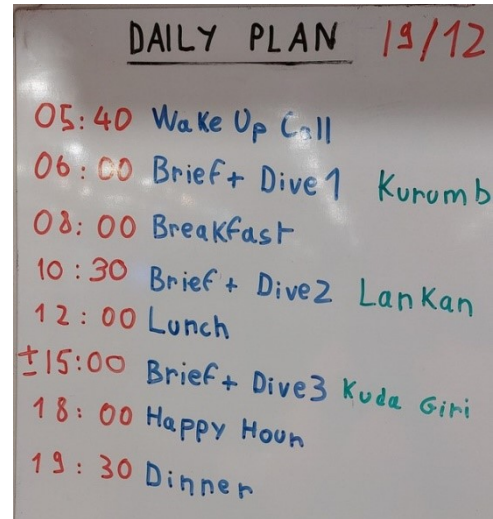
Currents play a huge factor in the diving we did. From what I understand, when the wind is blowing reliably out of the east, the current will be out of the east. When the wind is blowing out of the west, the current will mostly be out of the west. Tide only factors in a little bit. (Tidal range is normally 1-3 ft).

On EVERY dive, before we went in, someone would jump in to assess the current...speed and direction... and then the dive boat would put us normally up-current far enough that we could reach the front side of the reef easily. Sometimes currents ran 1-2 knots (not often). Sometimes they were negligible.

Normally we were diving the face of a reef. A cruiser without a surface boat could do inner atolls (but experience much less fish life). I would be very careful diving in the Maldives without either a surface support (someone in a dinghy) AND an inflatable marker buoy, or very carefully assessing the current.

1.1.7 Dive Maldives Book – Tim Godfrey

This is a really nice book. They had 2 copies of the 2006 3rd Edition on the boat. A lot of the dives we did were described in this book. This edition is not available on Amazon US, but was published in Australia, so it might be available in Oz.



1.2 Arrival Day – Dec 18, 2022

Our boat advertises “airport transfer”, but since the only way we could guarantee making the boat was arriving the day before, we had to arrange our own transfer to our hotel (100 MR each way), and back to the airport the next day to be met at the airport by the Emperor boat people. That all went well. Their transfer boat came directly to the quayside at the airport and picked us all up with all our luggage.

Since everyone had all their dive gear in their luggage, they unloaded us and the luggage to their “dhoni” (Maldives word for small boat), which was to be our dive platform for the next 9 days. Rather than using several inflatable RIBs, as on our last liveaboard, the Maldives standard is to have 1 companion boat big enough to dive the entire guest population from one boat. It’s kind of a neat arrangement... you set up your gear on one tank, and that is the tank you use for the next 9 days. The gear never comes off—they fill in place after each dive.

So we spent an hour sorting gear out of our luggage and getting everything set up. This gave everyone time, while we were still in Male and close to dive headquarters, to make sure everything they had was there and working.

We did a boat briefing mid-afternoon, and a dive safety briefing in the evening after the last diver had arrived and gotten sorted.

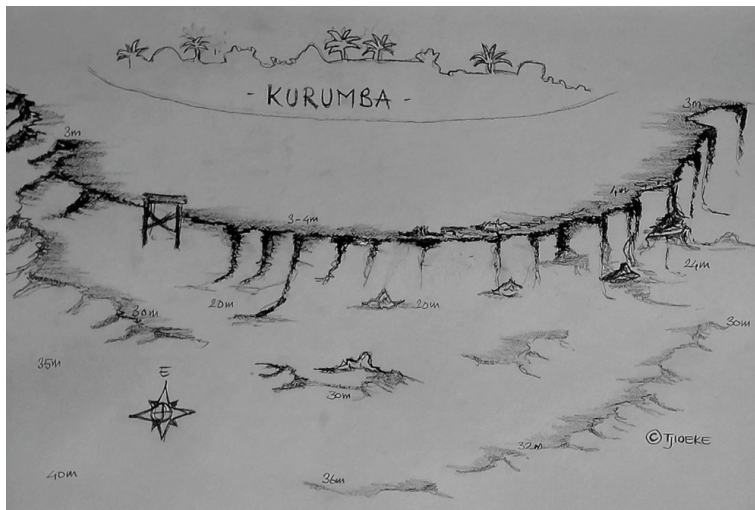
The guests on our boat come from Europe mostly—Germany, France, UK, mostly. I think we are the only Americans. Several people aboard have dived on this boat before, and a couple have done multiple trips to the Maldives.

1.3 Day 1 (First Diving Day, Male) – Dec 19, 2022

In the briefing after dinner the night before, they laid out the rough plan for the next day.

1.3.1 Dive 1 – Kurumba (Pg ??)

Today we were to do 3 dives, with the wakeup for the first dive starting at 05:40 am!! I made Dave participate in this early dive, as it was to be the check-out dive for everyone.



The first and second dives were close in to Male, and nothing to write home about. The first dive was a checkout dive, making sure everyone knew how to use a reef hook and a Surface Marker Buoy (SMB).

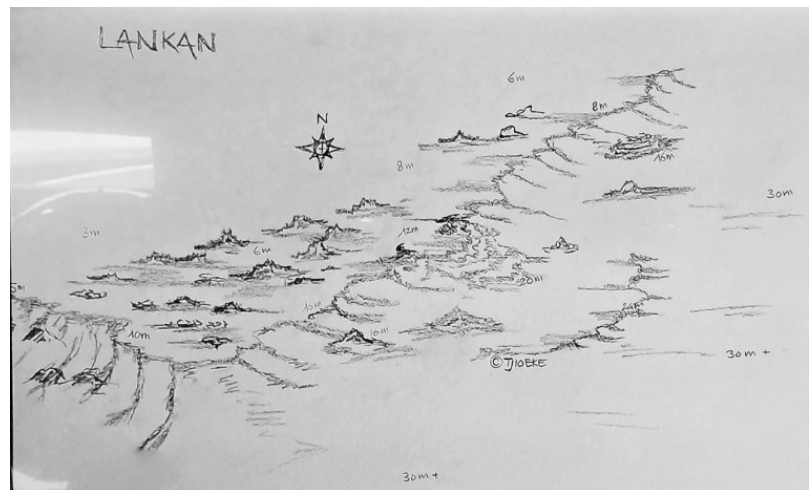
My computer zonked out in the middle of the dive, claiming I was at 120 ft deep. Probably a result of getting a little water in on our last dives in Indonesia (the battery compartment covers were failing).

1.3.2 Dive 2 – Lankan (Pg 39)

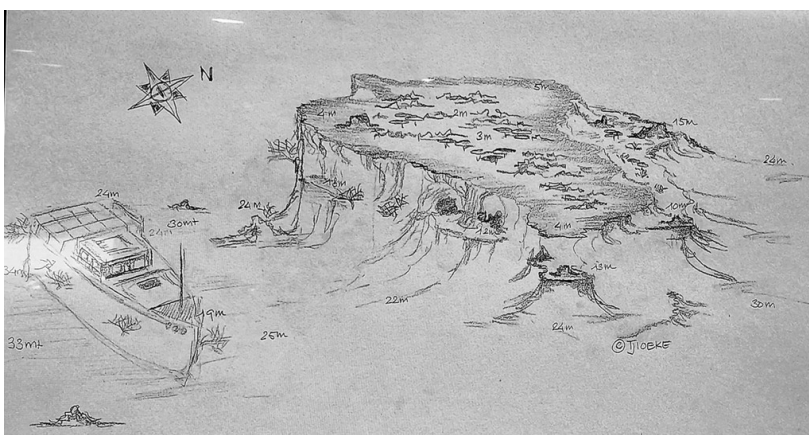
Down at 11:22 am, up at 12:15 pm.
Max depth 66 ft.

Second dive was a “manta dive” on a Manta cleaning station. This was in moderate current, so we went to a spot near the cleaning station, hooked in with our reef hooks, and sat there for 15-20 minutes staring into the nothingness. Apparently the first group in the water glimpsed one passing Manta, but no one was on the cleaning station. After we unhooked, we drifted with the current for about 15 minutes.

Good fish life—bigger and more fish than we’d seen in several years in SE Asia. The coral was mostly dead.



1.3.3 Dive 3 – Kuda Giri (Pg ??)



Down at 3:36 pm, up at 4:38 pm. Max Depth 91 ft.

The 3rd dive was better, a wreck and a reef. The wreck was sunk 20 years ago by a resort, and was in moderate condition. There was an interesting leaf fish on top of the wreck, but Dave had his camera settings messed up and didn’t get a good picture of it.

The reef had a lot of fish and some nice profile—caves, etc. But the water was (as is fairly normal INSIDE

an atoll) not that clear, so pictures didn’t come out.

There was a high overcast most of the day. The sun came out for a few minutes in the middle of the day. The dive boat is fully covered, so no one has to worry about sun protection. It would be nice to see more sun!

At the end of the day, at dinner, Dave and I were so tired, that we decided to skip the first dive tomorrow. Diving day 2 is planned for 4 dives. There's no way we can do 4 in one day!

1.4 Day 2 (South Male and Felidhe) – Dec 20, 2022

They promised not to knock on our door at 5:40 am for the first dive wake-up call, but of course, being the light sleeper that I am, I heard them knocking on others' doors, and the bell ringing 20 minutes later, signaling the first of the day's dive briefings. Since we went to bed at 9pm, I had plenty of sleep and got up just as the dhoni was leaving with the divers, to enjoy a quiet cup of coffee and catch up on computer things. Dave enjoyed sleeping in to a decent hour (7:30).

1.4.1 Dive 1 – Kandooma Thila, South Male (Pg 65)

(no briefing picture, no details of the dive, as we didn't attend briefing or do the dive)

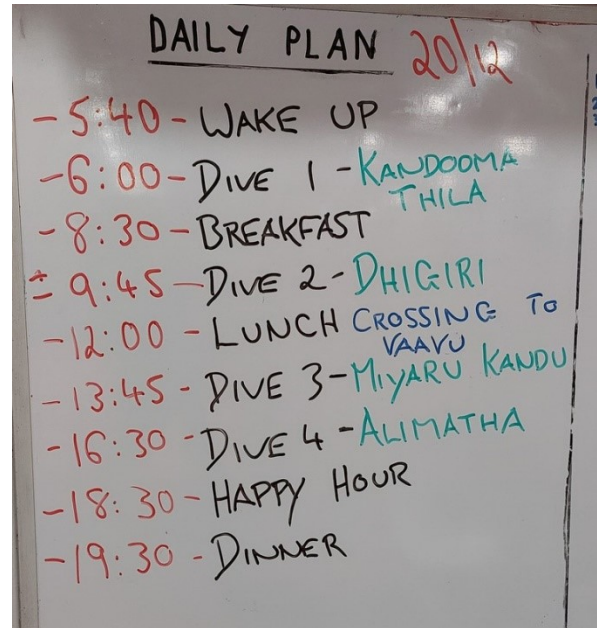
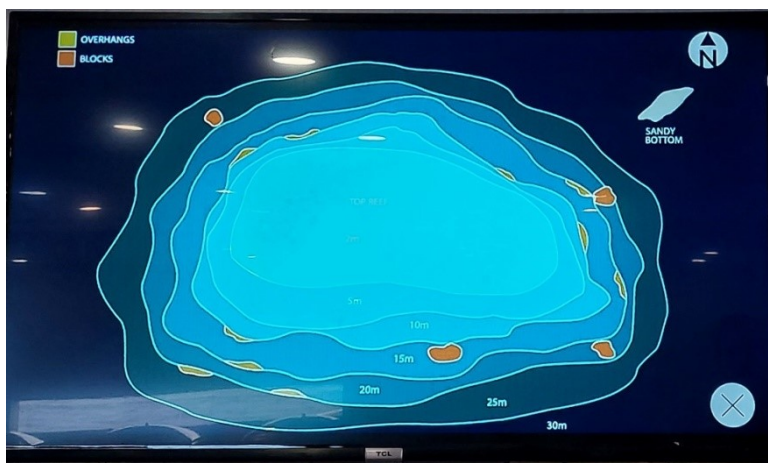
The divers on the first dive reported great fish action, sharks, and eagle rays, but still so-so visibility (and the low light in early morning hour didn't help).

After the first dive, we had breakfast and then the boat started moving south to the next Atoll, Felidhe Atoll. We were heading SSE and had a 6'-8' swell on the beam. The boat was rolling pretty well. Everyone hunkered down for the ~1 hour trip across the open water. Once inside the reef, the swell was gone, and just the 1' chop caused by the light winds from the ENE.

1.4.2 Dive 2 – Dhigiri, NE Felidhe Atoll (Pg 64??)

Down at 10:45 am, up at 11:46 am. Max depth 67 ft.

The second dive was on a spot known for Nurse Sharks. It is a patch reef off a resort. Apparently the resort used to feed the sharks (but claim not to now). Our briefing told us that the sharks learned that that area was a feeding area, and knew that the feeding took place when boats were there. So now, like little "Pavlov dogs", when boats come by, they still gather around, even though no one is (supposed to be) feeding them. (We are quite sure they are still being fed from the tourist boats, but maybe not from the nearby resort.)



(We are quite sure they are still being fed from the tourist boats, but maybe not from the nearby resort.)

We jumped in up-current of the boats, and drifted down until we were basically underneath the boats. There were TONS of BIG nurse sharks circling under the stern of the 3-4 boats that were there.

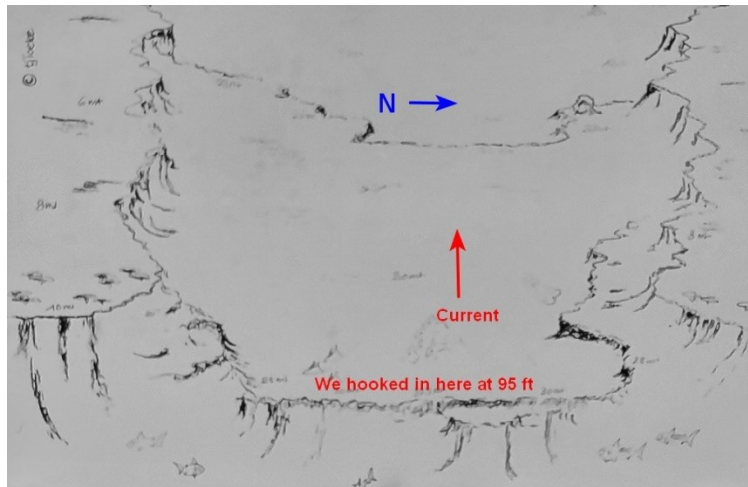
There were a bunch of smallish boats anchored on the edge of the patch reef. Our guides claim the sharks are

not being fed any more, but we definitely saw the sharks groveling in the sand for something.

1.4.3 Dive 3 – Miyaru Kandu, E Felidhe Atoll (Pg 111) (03°35.9'N / 073°30.1'E)

Down at 2:23pm, up at 3:09pm. Max depth 99 ft.

The third dive was a Miyaru Kandu. In the local language, Miyaru means “Shark” and Kandu means “Channel”. This was a great dive!



The current was (finally) incoming, so the water was pretty clear. We followed our guides out into the middle of the channel in the fairly strong current, and hooked in with our reef hooks in about 95 ft of water. At this depth, we get about 15-20 minutes of bottom time (diving with a 32% Nitrox mix).

We spent the whole time in nice clear water, watching the Gray Reef Sharks patrol the edge of the channel. It was glorious. When our “remaining bottom time” on our dive computers got down

to 5 minutes, we unhooked and drifted with the current along the reef. The reef here was pretty dead, and covered in sand. But lots of fish life.

Dave didn’t take his camera on this dive, because of the current. I told him “We’re going to have an awesome dive, if you don’t have your camera.” I was right.

1.4.4 Dive 4 – Alimatha Jetty, E Felidhe Atoll (Pg ??) (03-35.5 N / 073-29.8 E)

Down at 5:01pm, up at 5:53pm. Max depth 57 ft.



The last dive of the day was at 5pm under the jetty at Alimatha. Again, we were told that the sharks used to be fed off the jetty, but were no longer being fed. But the sharks still remember being fed at dusk, and especially when boats come and go.

So we jumped in up-current of the pier, and made our way along the bottom until we were just off the pier. We had to stay close to the bottom, as the pier is an active pier, and boats were coming and going.

Again we saw a massive

aggregation of BIG nurse shark—as many as 10 at a time, especially when a boat would come in. They are slow moving and clumsy—often bumping into divers.

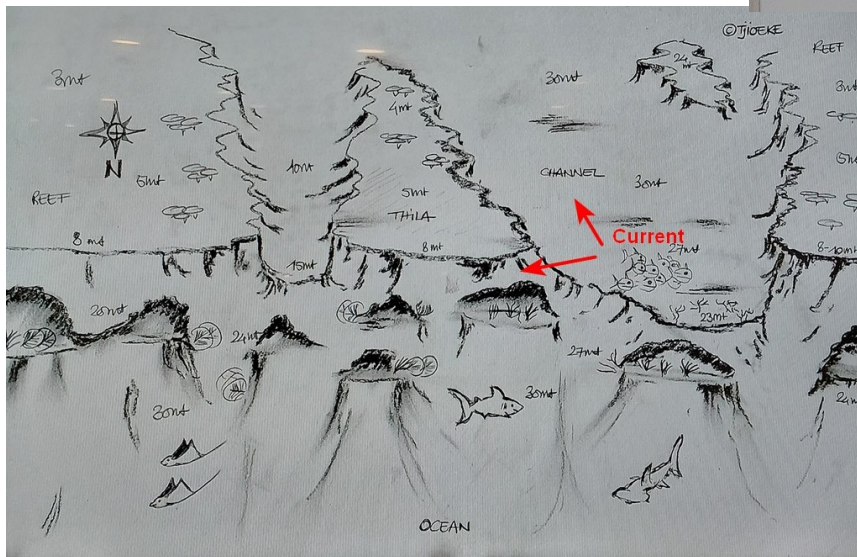
Dave didn’t take his camera on this dive either, because of the current.

1.5 Day 3 (Felidhe Atoll) – Dec 21, 2022

The plan for Day 4 was to do one dive at the easternmost channel in the SE corner of Felidhe Atoll, move a little SW to do a dive on Fushi Kandou, move again to Rakeedo, in the SW corner of Felidhe, do a 3rd dive, and then make the ~4-5 hour passage west to South Ari Atoll.

1.5.1 Dive 1 – Fotteyo, SE Felidhe Atoll (Pg 115)

Down at 6:37am, up at 7:33am. Max depth 102 ft. Water Temp 79°F.



Because we were only offered 3 dives today, we decided we had to get up at 05:40am to take part in the first dive. Good thing, as this was a very nice dive. We had a light current running across the seaward side of the channel, from west to east, and a light current going inward in the channel.

The first part of the dive, we went to 95-100 ft in the blue, off the channel, looking for the (rare) hammerhead sharks. We didn't see any.

Then back to the reef wall, and along the reef from W to E. Lots of caves at 90-95 feet, some with White Tip sharks, and big rays. Pretty soft corals. Lots of fish. Nice clear water.

1.5.2 Dive 2 – Fushi Kandou, SE Felidhe Atoll (Pg 114) (03°28.0'N / 073°39.3'E)



Down at 10:18, up at 11:20, max depth 90 ft, but most of the time cruising the edge of the reef at 45 ft. Water Temp 80°F.

This was supposed to be a channel/shark dive. We saw 1-2 sharks, but the reef on the way in at 45 ft was amazingly full of fish. There were also large schools of small barracuda, some Giant Trevally. 2 small turtles, 1 octopus, a number of white lobster. The reef was mostly

DAILY PLAN

- 5:40 - WAKE UP
- 6:00 - DIVE 1 - FOTTEYO
- 8:30 - BREAKFAST
- 9:45 - DIVE 2 - FUSHI KANDU
- 12:00 - LUNCH
- 13:45 - DIVE 3 - RAKEEDOO
- CROSSING TO ARIZONA"
- 18:00 - HAPPY HOUR
- 19:00 - DINNER

alive (better than any reef we've seen so far), but wasn't beautiful, as most of the coral was brown.

1.5.3 Dive 3 – Rakeedho, SW Felidhe Atoll (Pg 116) (03°18.6'N / 073°28.3'E)

Down at 14:16, up at 15:10, max depth 93 ft, but most of the time cruising the edge of the reef at 45 ft. Water Temp 81°F.

The Rakeedho Channel faces south, on the SW corner of Felidhe Atoll. We anchored the big boat inside the channel, near the island.

We took the dive boat out to the end of the channel, and put someone in the water to assess current. The guy said "light current, outbound". So we went back inside the channel to start our dive. However,



once we got in the water, the current started out light, but actually was coming in at a pretty good clip.

Fortunately, our guide encouraged us to keep working out the channel (by stopping and resting with reef hooks periodically). Eventually we got to the corner, where the current suddenly stopped, and started going along the reef to the west. Lots of reef fish on our right hand, and sharks and pelagics on our left hand, including at least one

1m bump-head wrasse.

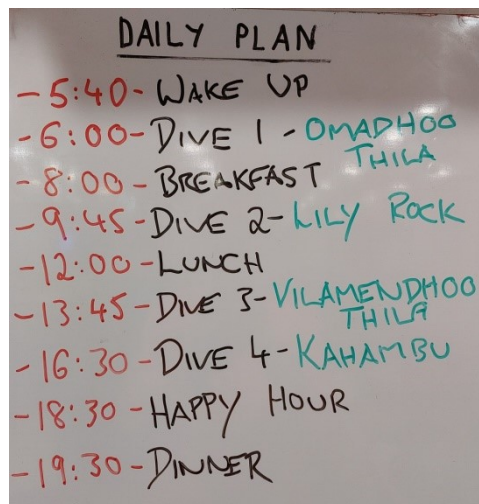
Apparently the current was hitting the corner square-on, and splitting, going into the channel, and going along the reef. Once we got to the corner, we hooked in in light current and hung out and watched the fish life—lots of pelagics—some sharks.

After a bit, we unhooked and drifted west along the reef at around 35 feet. Table coral on the reef, pelagic fish and the occasional shark in the blue.

The corner is located at approximately 03° 18.61' N / 073° 28.28' E

The rest of the afternoon was spent moving from SW Felidhe to SE Ari.

1.6 Day 4 (South Ari Atoll) – Dec 22, 2022



1.6.1 Dive 1 – Omadhoo Thila

In at 6:38, out at 7:37. Max depth 90 ft. Water Temp 79°F.

This was the 6am dive. Dave didn't go. I didn't make notes on the dive right afterward, and I forget the details. Thila means deep reef.



1.6.2 Dive 2 – Camel Rock (Lily Beach)

In at 10:15, out at 11:15. Max depth 66 ft. Water Temp 79°F.

Supposed to be a Manta cleaning station, but the mantas weren't cleaning today. A bit of current. We hung out and looked at the cleaning station, but then gave up and hunted around for interesting things on the adjacent reef.

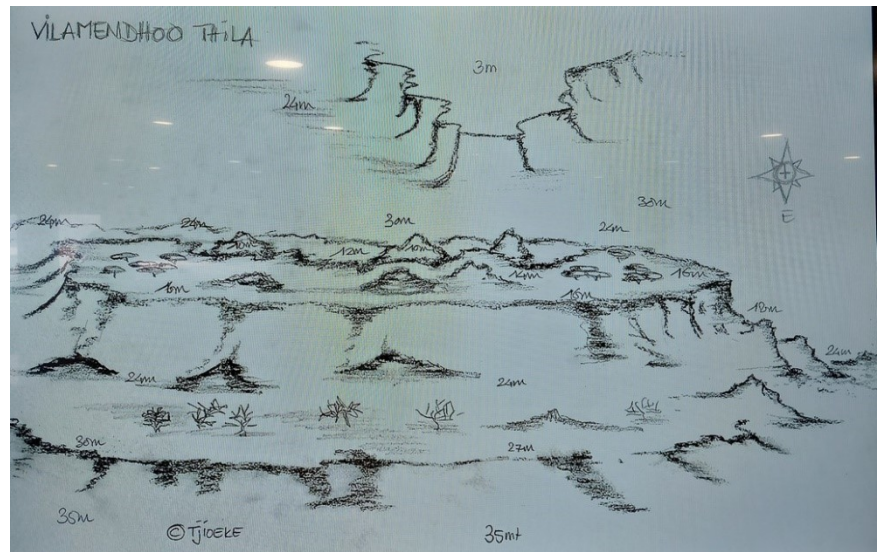


As we were boarding the dive boat, the dive boat crew said they'd seen 2 mantas feeding on the surface. So they took us over there and about 10 of us jumped in to snorkel. The manta of course was panicked and moved away as fast as we swam toward it. I did get one glimpse of the manta. It was big! Dave didn't take camera gear in to snorkel, so no pictures.

1.6.3 Dive 3 – Vilamendhoo Thila

We went out to this spot and the guides looked at the current and said "Nope, we're not diving here."

So we went to Dengherhi Beyru.



1.6.4 Dive 4 – Dengherhi Beyru

Down at 14:55, up at 15:56. Max depth 87 ft. Water Temp 80°F

This is a reef wall right in front of a nice resort.



1.7 Day 5 (South Ari Atoll) – Dec 23, 2022

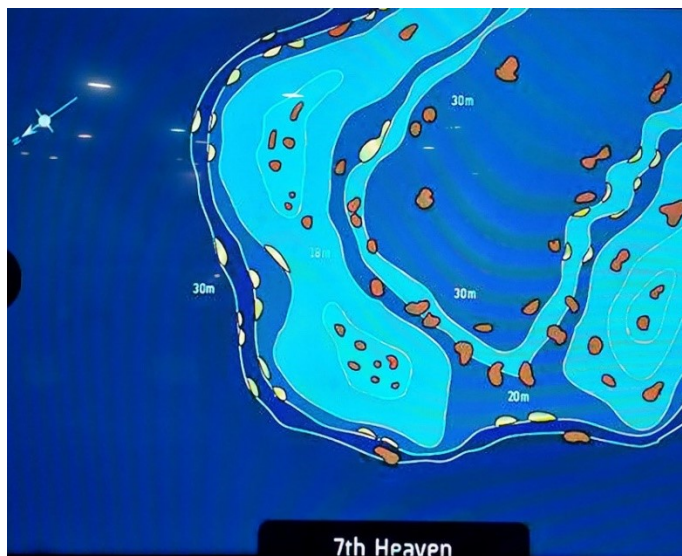
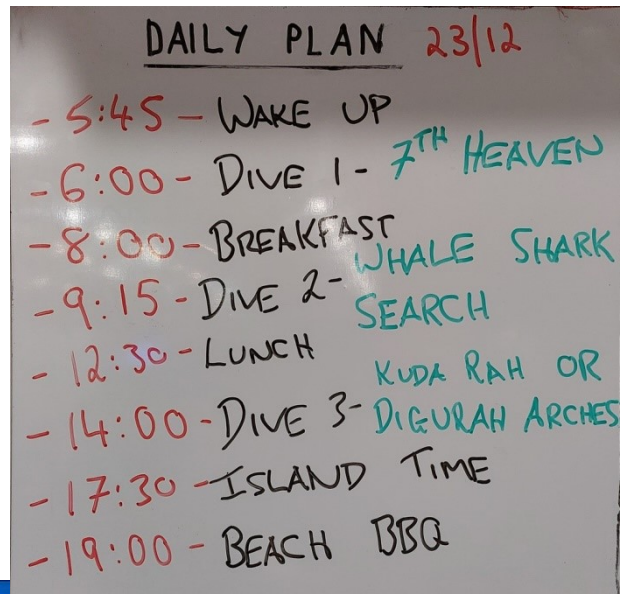
1.7.1 Dive 1 – 7th Heaven

Down at 6:55, up at 7:39. Max depth 79 ft. Water temp 83°F.

I had a major problem with fins at start of dive (starting with jumping in with no fins, then strap coming out when trying to put them on). Spent 5 mins on surface struggling with fins. Finally went down with buddy Paul (Dave sleeping in), eventually caught up with group.

Strong current, except when hiding behind walls. Low light, and not great vis. Nothing very exciting on this dive. Not bad, but not great.

Note: in briefing picture, brown things are coral lumps and yellow things are caves/overhangs.



1.7.2 Dive 2 – Whale Sharks? & Bodu Finolhu

Plan was for us to go in the dive boat looking for whale sharks on the surface— maybe snorkel if we do see a whale shark, then dive in the vicinity.

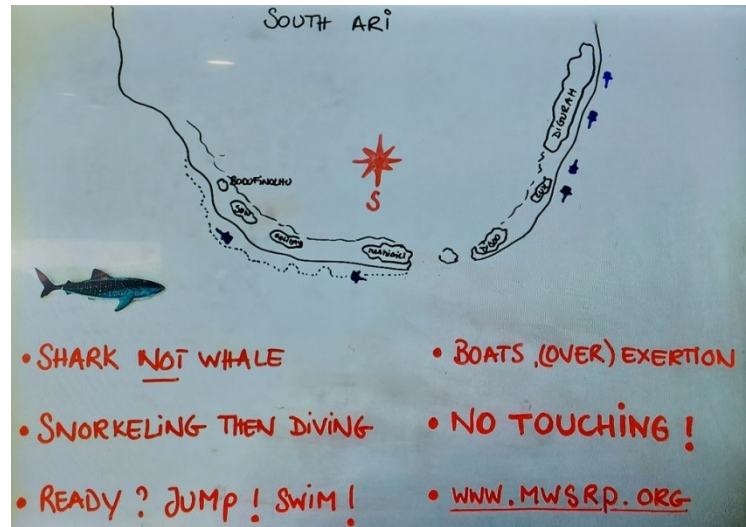
The whale shark area is along the SSW coast of Ari Atoll.

We went out the pass at the southern tip, then west along the reef. There were 3-4 other dive/snorkel boats doing the same thing. As far as I know, no one saw any whale sharks today. So we didn't snorkel but did do a dive.

In at 10:45, out at 11:41, max depth 80 ft. Water temp 82°F

At the western extremity, approx. 03-39.29 N / 072-45.76 W, we dropped in off the reef and drifted with the current (eastwards, I think). Visibility wasn't great, it was surgey, but it was a nice relaxed dive, and there were lots of fish.

The big boat stayed anchored at (I think) Dhgirah Long Beach, where we had the beach BBQ

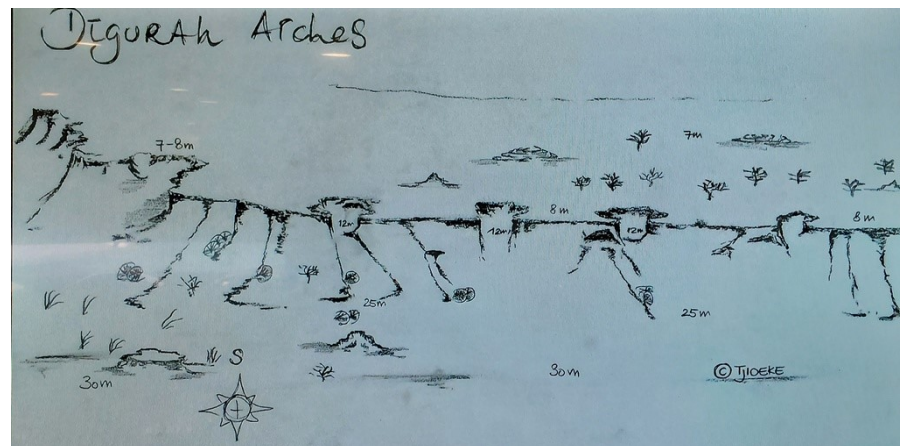


1.7.3 Dive 3 – Dhigurah Arches

In at 14:31, out at 15:31. Max depth 65 ft, but most of the dive was in 30-45 ft. Water temp 81°F

The arches are on the outside wall of Dhigurah, on the western side.

Nice dive, relaxed, mild current, lots of fish, lots of profile.



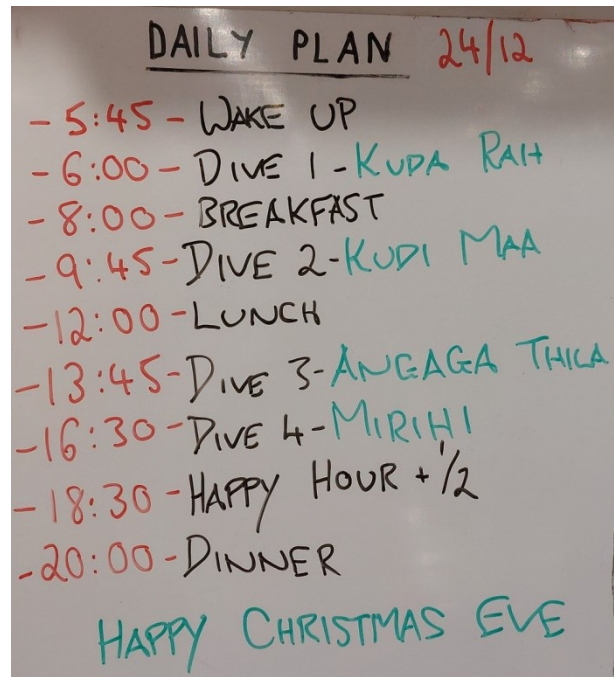
1.8 Day 6 – South Ari Atoll – Dec 24, 2022

1.8.1 Dive 1 – Kuda Rah

We didn't do this dive, but were told afterward by several of the divers that this was the best dive so far!

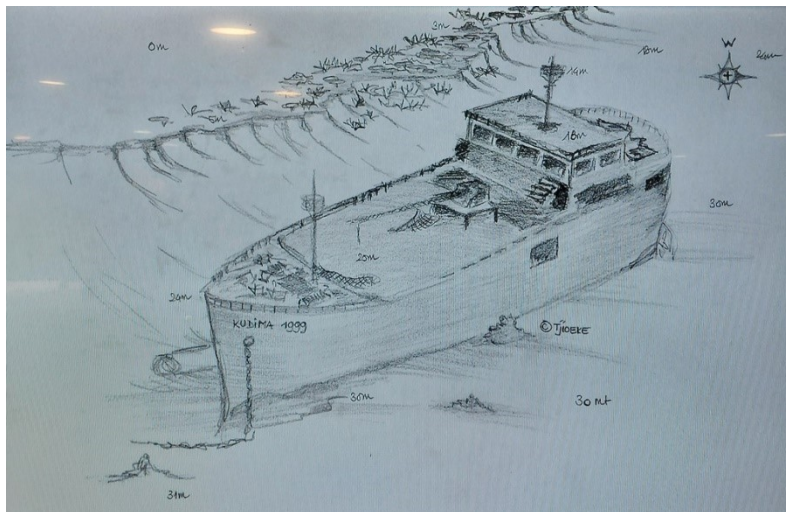
So many fish that you couldn't see the reef. Moderate current, moderate visibility.

Approx location 03° 33.5884' N / 072° 55.4296' E (Look for dive boats)



1.8.2 Dive 2 – Kudi Maa (Wreck)

Down at 10:11 am, up at 11:06, Max depth 85 ft. (However, sand is at about 95 ft). Water temp 79°F



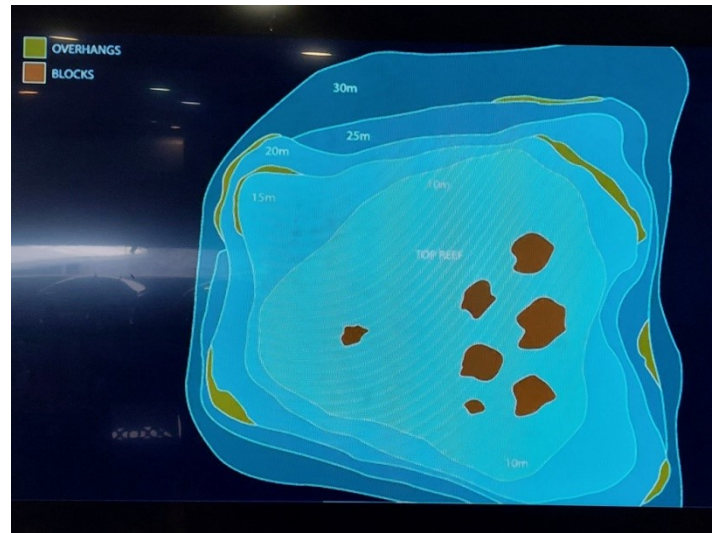
This is a wreck that was sunk 20 years ago. It is still in fairly good condition, can still do some swim-thrus safely. The hard and soft coral growth is extensive, so a nice habitat as well. Several stonefish on the wreck and one frogfish, plus some nudis (mostly found near the bow). Nice dive. Right next to the resort that sunk it.

Approx location 03-35.72N / 072-53.28E. Look for dive boats.

1.8.3 Dive 3 – Angaga Thila

Down at 14:07, up at 15:10. Max depth 90 ft. Water temp 79°F.

This was a nice dive in very little current. Coral wasn't outstanding, but the fish life was. The start was very clear water, but by the end there was lots of stuff in the water. At the end of the dive, there was a big rock (top at about 30 ft) that had 8-9 purple anemones. Very pretty.



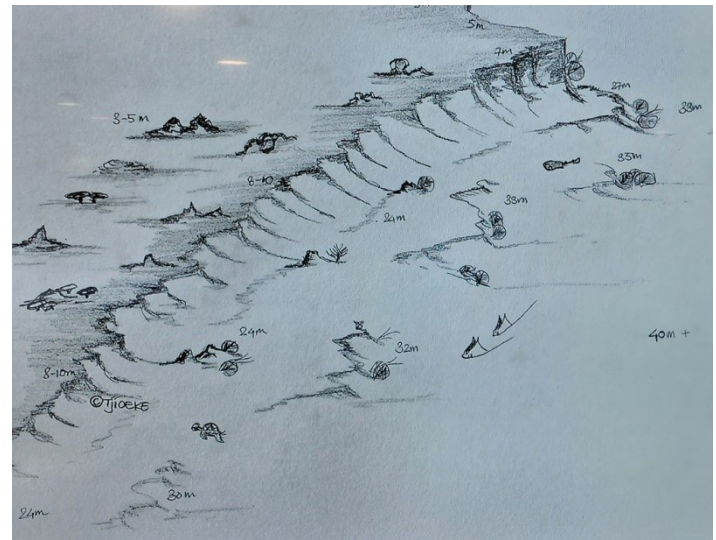
1.8.4 Dive 4 – Mirihi

03° 36.87' N / 072° 46.00' E

Down at 4:53, up at 5:39. Max depth 56 ft. Water temp 82°F.

A shallow dive on a steep slope/wall. Pretty boring dive. Coral was really nice along this wall, but not much in the way of fish. Was late in the afternoon on an overcast day, so not good light to appreciate the coral.

We spent Christmas Eve anchored off Mirihi (outside lagoon). The crew put on a nice Christmas dinner with a little extra (free) wine and champagne.

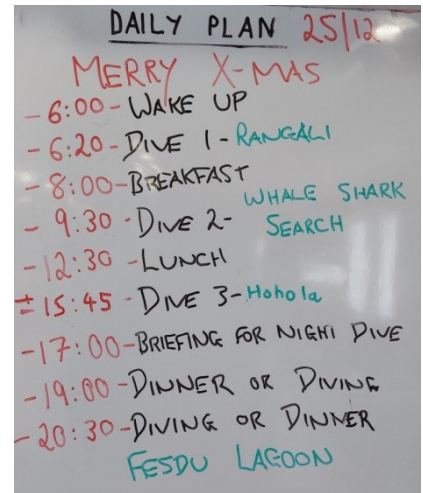
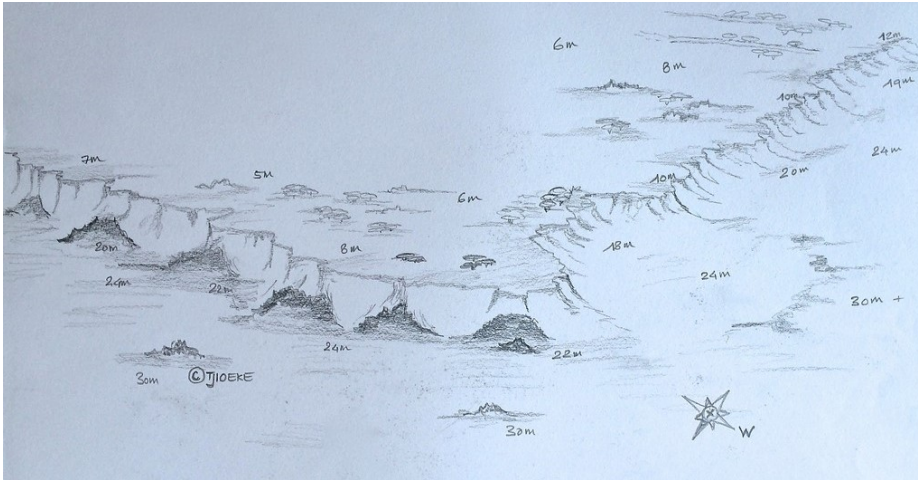


1.9 Day 7 – South Ari Atoll – Dec 25, 2022

Sunshine! Merry Christmas!

1.9.1 Dive 1 – Rangali

Another 6:30 am dive we skipped. They saw a manta.



1.9.2 Dive 2 – Whale Sharks & Maamagili Beyru

Down at 10:41, up at 11:43. Max depth 80 ft, but most of the dive was at 40-50 ft. Water temp 83°F.

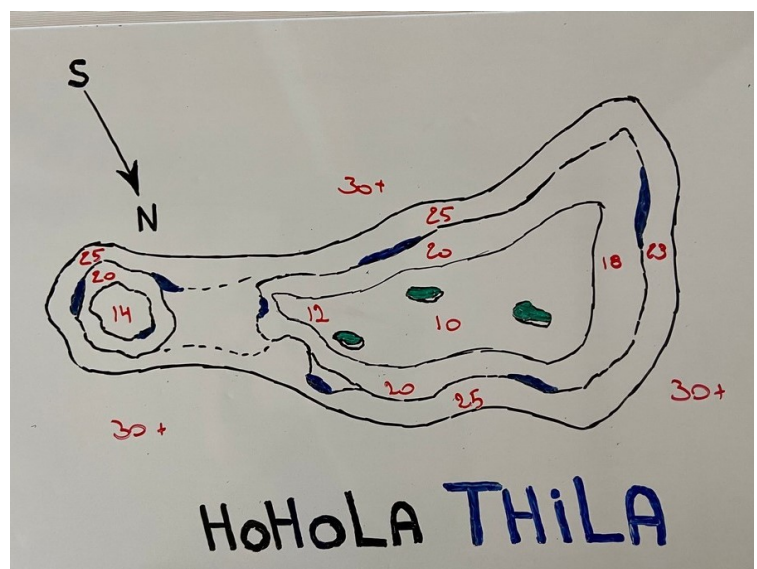
This was a repeat of 1.7.2, same location, except this time, we didn't go as far west, and we did find a whale shark. We snorkeled (en mass, snorkelers from 4-5 boats all chasing one big fish). Then we did a dive, and at the beginning of the dive, we saw another, different whale shark, heading out to sea.

Then we drifted east along the reef with the current. The reef was OK. Again visibility started out pretty good, but got worse as we went east. Some live coral making a come-back. Some fish. 2 turtles who didn't mind us being in close proximity, a nurse shark with its head under a rock, several very large cowries.

I didn't mark on the GPS where we jumped in and saw the shark, but may be able to figure it out later from the track.

1.9.3 Dive 3 – Hohola

Down at 16:30, up at 17:31. Max depth 85 ft. Water temp 83°F.

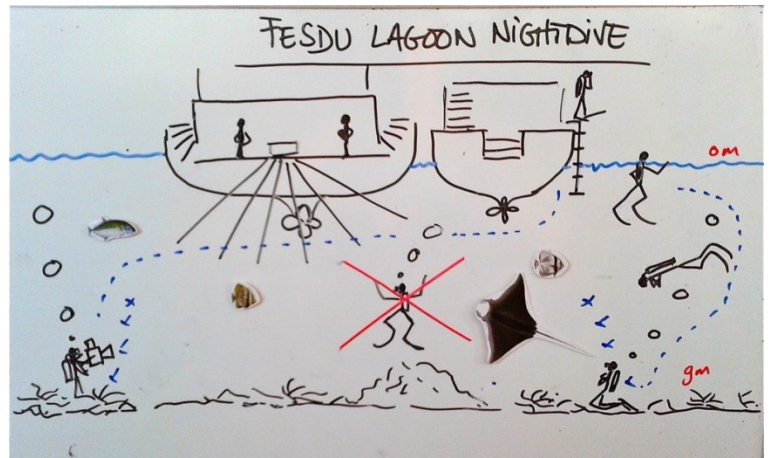


1.9.4 Dive 4 – Night Dive – Fesdu Lagoon – Mantas

We didn't actually do this dive, but since the group dove right off the stern of the big boat, we could see everything. Basically, they go down and shine lights up, attracting plankton. The mantas are attracted to the plankton, and swoop around gobbling up food. Divers kneel on the bottom, just out of the light, and watch. Our guys saw a few mantas.

There were 5-6 liveaboard in this lagoon overnight doing the same thing.

Entrance to this lagoon is on the north side. The big liveaboards try to go in and out at high tide. (3.5m draft)



1.10 Day 8 – North Ari Atoll – Dec 26, 2022

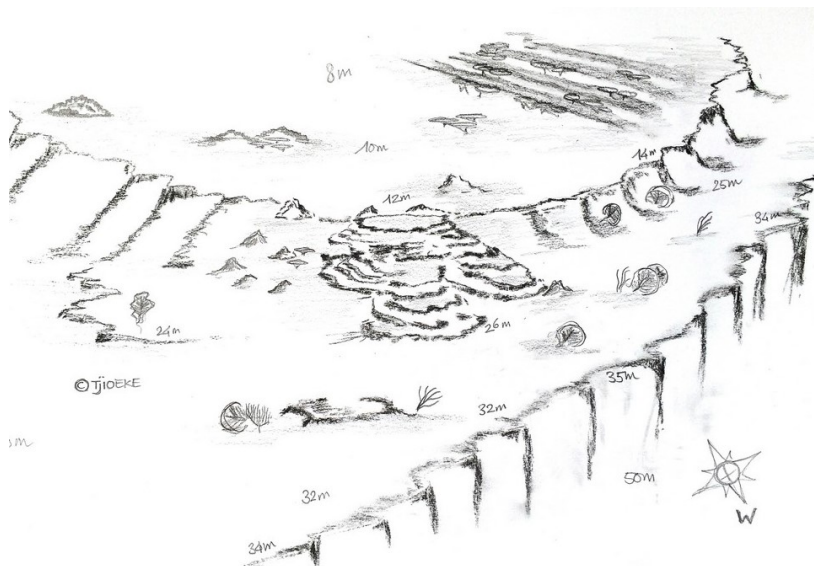
1.10.1 Dive 1 – Fish Head



Down at 6:41, up about 7:45. Max depth 85 ft, top of the reef about 30 ft. 78°F

Almost no current on this dive (today). Lots and lots of fish, sharks, eagle rays, and a few nudis.

Smallish pinnacle, pretty much swam around the whole thing because of no current, but best part is supposed to be the up-current side, where all the fish will be.



1.10.2 Dive 2 – Moofushi

Down at 10:15, up at 11:00. Max depth 90 ft. Water temp 81°F.

Another Manta Cleaning Station with no mantas. We spent ~15 minutes waiting for mantas, hooked in in moderate current with reef hooks, and then moved off. There were literally 7 dive boats at the end of our dive, picking up people. Tons of people on the reef and around the cleaning station. If I were a manta, I wouldn't go there.

1.10.3 Dive 3 – Maaya Thila

04-05.495'N / 072-51.730'E with a current from NW. We jumped in at the N tip of the pinnacle and drifted around to the west side of the pinnacle in weak current.



Down at 14:23, up at 15:21. Max depth 89 ft, but we spent the first half of the dive mostly around 75-80 ft and then the last half at 25-35 ft. It was all good. Water temp a rather chilly 78°F

Maaya Thila is a small pinnacle NE of Maaya Atoll. The top of the reef is at about 25 ft, and it sloped off to deep on every side. Lots and lots of fish life, especially on the up-current side of the reef. Sharks circling, tons of fish of every kind. We saw 3-4 turtles, 3-4 moray eels (one free-swimming), an eagle ray

or two, a cuttlefish, a white lobster, and a peacock mantis.

Due to the large amount of particulate in the water, visibility was horrible. (as on most of the dives).

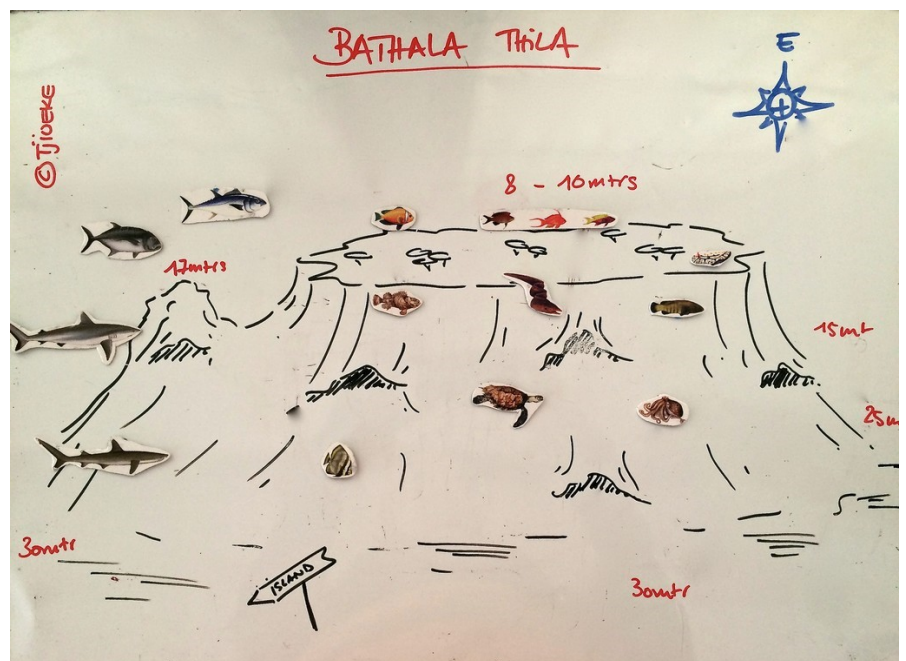
1.10.4 Dive 4 – Maaya Thila Night Dive

Same dive as 1.10.3, but down at ~6pm and up at 7pm. We didn't do it.

1.11 Day 9 – North Ari to Male – Dec 27, 2022

1.11.1 Dive 1 - Bathala Thila

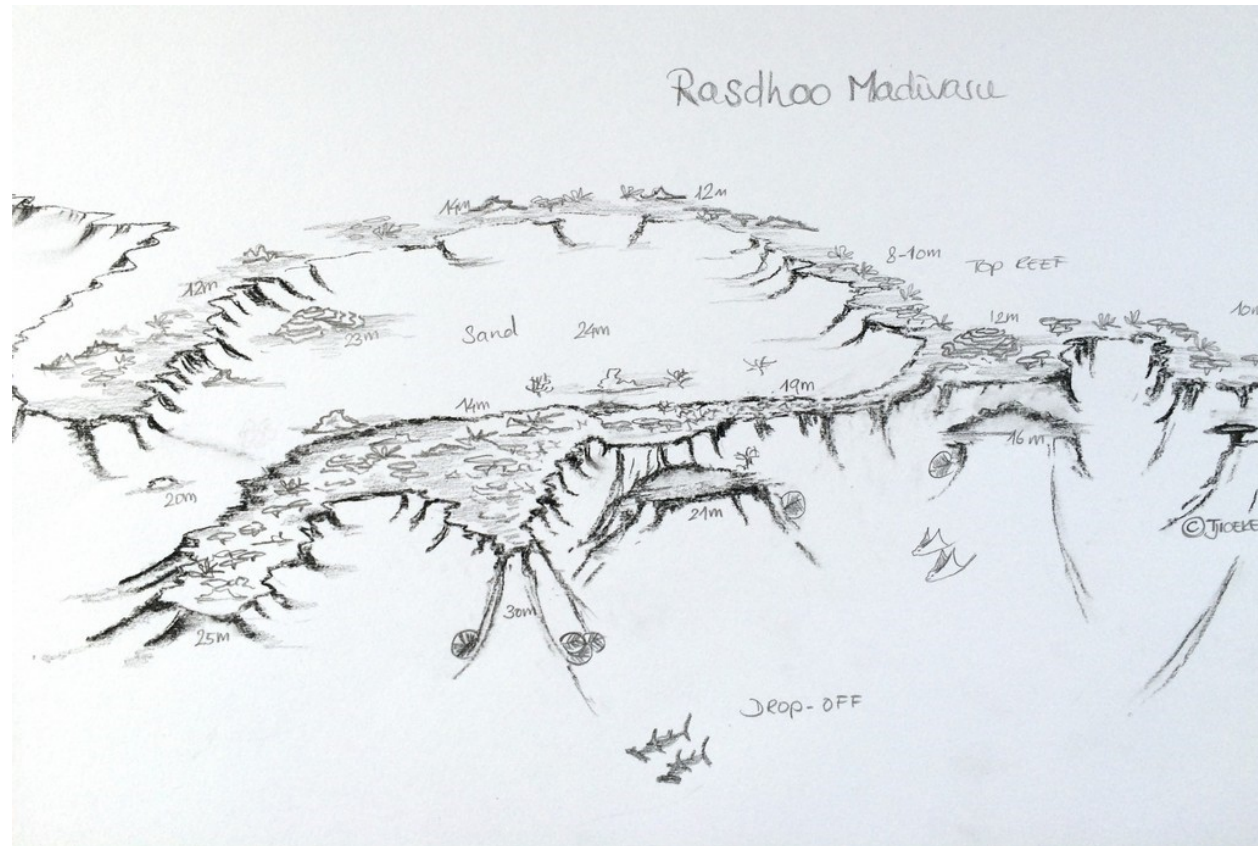
Down at 6:28 am, up at 7:27 am. Max depth 86 ft. Temp 78F.



1.11.2 Dive 2 – Rasdhoo Madivaru

Down at 10:21, up at 11:27. Max depth 80 ft, but most of the dive was at 40-50 ft. Temp 82F.

Lots of sharks and fish. Nice dive.



1.11.3 Back in Hulumale

From Rasdhoo, we went straight back to the anchorage in Hulumale, and at 7am the next morning, we were dropped off at the airport with all our gear.

The dive crew rinsed and hung out all our gear right after the Rasdhoo dive, so it was mostly dry by the time we had to pack it up.

1.12 Last Day in Male

The boat dropped us off at the airport quay at 7am, and our airplane didn't leave until 9:30pm, so we had 12 hours to kill. What to do? We had fun exploring Male, and trying to figure out their cheap transportation system (ie buses, not taxis).

We left our bags at the airport bag storage (\$6 USD per bag) and then took the 10MVR ferry from the Airport to Male. From there we walked around until we saw a bus stop sign. But looking for routing information by bus in Google Maps turned up nothing.

After googling for a bit, I finally found and downloaded the RTL Travel App, which gives you routes, real-time tracking of buses, and a way to pay for electronic tickets. We took Route 10 for about an hour around Male for 7MVR (around US 50 cents), and then eventually picked up the Route 3 bus back to the airport (VIA) for 10MVR. The buses are brand new and air conditioned.

There are also routes from Hulhumale (HM Phase 1 and 2) to Male, all for 5-10MVR. The around Male bus had a cash option but the Male to VIA bus REQUIRED a ticket (we used the app and a credit card).

For price comparison with the airport taxi's. the taxi charged 100 MVR for the ride from the airport to our hotel in Hulhumale. If you're not lugging a bunch of dive gear, the bus is really the way to go.

There are also ferry routes in the app, but we didn't explore these.

While in Male we went to the National Museum, the local veggie & fish market, and had a good but fairly pricey lunch at the Seagull Cafe.

1.13 Summary and Conclusions

We loved our time on the [Emperor Explorer](#). The boat was nice, the food great, and the crew great—I highly recommend this boat and this organization if you are contemplating diving the Maldives. The Maldives are gorgeous.

After spending most of 2022 diving the hot spots in Indonesia, including Raja Ampat, Triton Bay, Alor, Maumere (Flores) and Komodo, we were a little underwhelmed by the Maldives. Partly because we are plain spoiled with all the great diving spots we have done, and also because we (Dave) tends to like macro better than “big fish” diving. And the Maldives are all about big fish.

We did see Whale Sharks (a couple), Mantas (a few), Nurse Sharks (a lot, and up close), and other sharks (quite a few). The fish life is amazingly better than Indonesia and the Philippines, because the reefs we were diving are protected, and not every fisherman takes every fish they can lay their hands on. The coral is not so great, though—there was a warm water event in 2016, and in the affected places are only just starting to come back. (Some reefs had pretty good coral, but most dive spots we did, did not—the hunt on this trip was for “big fish”, not “pretty coral”.)

The biggest surprise for us was the visibility. We expected a Palau-Blue-Corner experience—clear blue water and the big fish. But most dives, the visibility was fair-to-poor, due to nutrients in the water, and, probably, in part due to the amount of “land reclamation” activity that goes on in the Maldives.

The currents are an issue if trying to dive on your own from a sailboat. Even our really experienced Maldives guides did a “current check” on every dive, and we always had a surface boat to pick us up when we finished a dive. Relying on tide tables to plan your dives is not going to work. The wind direction contributes to currents as much as tides do.

We also didn't have great weather—there was a cyclone way south and front and low way north, and this generated quite a bit of cloud cover, and west winds (the winds are supposed to be NE from Dec-Mar). The last few days we had sunshine. The lack of sunshine was definitely a contributor to our “not as great as we'd hoped” rating for Maldives diving. Wind most of the time was a gentle 5-10 knots, occasionally the breeze picked up to 15 knots.

We'll get some underwater pictures published somewhere soon.

Accompanying this writeup are 2 GPX files—one with the dive waypoints recorded on my Garmin handheld, and our track files of where we went in the dive boat.