

# Introduction

## A NATION OF ISLANDS

Scattered across the equator in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the gem like Islands of the Maldives depict the rare vision of a tropical paradise. Palm fringed islands with sparkling white beaches, turquoise lagoons, clear warm waters and coral reefs teeming with abundant varieties of marine flora and fauna, continue to fascinate visitors, as It has fascinated others In the past, for thousands of years. Marco Polo referred to the Maldives as the ...flower of the; !ndies', and Ibn Batuta called her in his chronicles &lsquo;one of wonders of the world'.

Truly a natural wonder, the height of the islands rarely reach above two meters. The 1,190 Islands, consisting of 19 atoll formations, are spread over an area of 90,000 square kilometers.

Maldivian atolls are a classic discovery in its own right: the word atoll has been derived from Dhivehi, the Maldivian language, from the word atholhu,

The Islands are surrounded by shallow crystal clear lagoons enclosed by coral reefs. The unique islands provide visitors with one of the most breathtaking views of underwater life In the world. Formed above peaks emerging from the depths of the ocean, upto layers of both living and dead coral and remains of other marine life. the islands are generally covered with dense tropical vegetation. Coconut palms towering above over dense shrubs and hardy plants protecting the shores from erosion are the natural features in most Islands. The smaller Islands and sand banks under formation are also wonders in themselves. These Islands together embody living entities in various stages of formation, as interdependent elements in an ecology, in a food chain where birds, fish, and other marine life co-exist, with humans at Its apex as caretakers for centuries.