

Bhatala 1998

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My first trip to the Maldives was in February 1998. My wife and I spent the first week on a tour of Sri Lanka, which will be documented separately. At the end of the tour, we flew from Columbo to Male and the by sea plane to Bathala island in the Ari Atoll. I picked it for 2 reasons, it was small with an excellent house reef and offered a sea plane transfer; one of those things I had always wanted to experience. We had a wonderful week on our desert island. There were only about 40 beach huts, the dining room had a sand floor and you could walk round the whole island in 10 minutes. All of the other guests were German and it was obviously a popular place. The German Doctor I buddied with was on his 15th visit and he was not alone in being a repeat visitor. The main thing I can remember now was the strong currents and I had to learn new tricks (from my buddy) in how to handle this situation. The dive guides seemed oblivious to the divers puffing along in their wake, but we survived and enjoyed some excellent diving. As it was mainly a family holiday, I only did one boat dive a day. However, my enduring memory is of the the many times I spent snorkelling from the jetty onto the house reef. In fact many people spent much of their time diving the house reef rather than taking the boat trips. You could just about swim round the island on a tank of air. Standing on the jetty, you could often see sharks swimming just out in the blue and every evening a small shoal of Stingrays would visit the shallow waters at the top of the house reef. Boat diving was done from the Dhoni's which also provided all the other routine transport between islands and from the seaplane mooring Overall I was not disappointed though the quality of the pictures I took was embarrassingly poor, not helped by low res scanning. On this trip I dived at:

Giru Tala 28M 57mins	Eilladdu Tala 26M 47mins	Bathala Tila 27M 44mins
Fishhead reef 27M 51mins	Maaya Tila 25M 56 mins	



Grumpy looking blue & yellow fish over some healthy looking hard coral



Corals on a reef wall



Goat fish



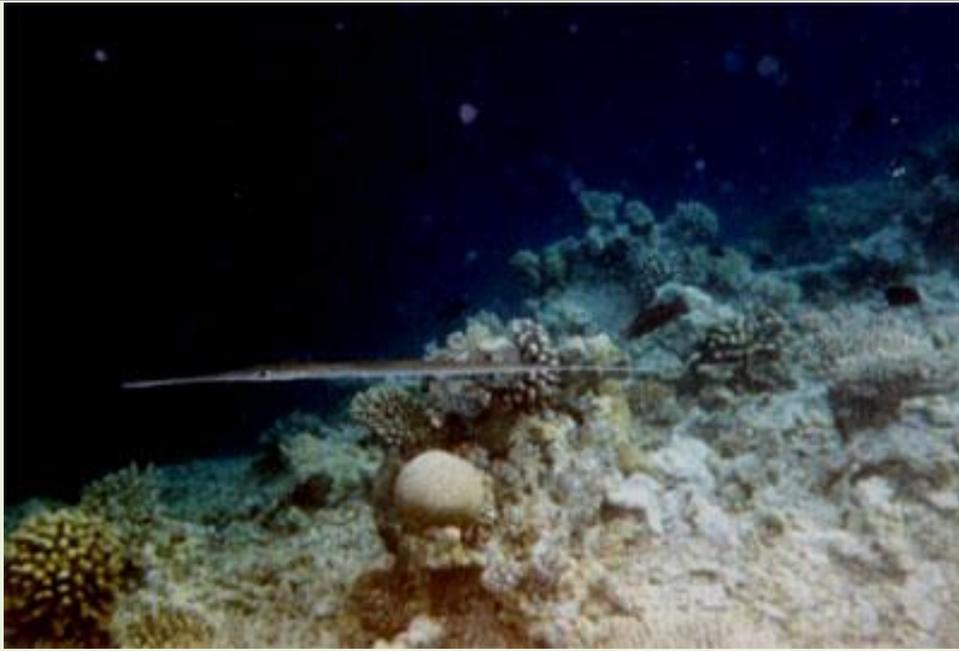
Bhatala from the dive boat



Our end of the beach from the jetty



Our desert island room



Pipe fish



Sweetlips



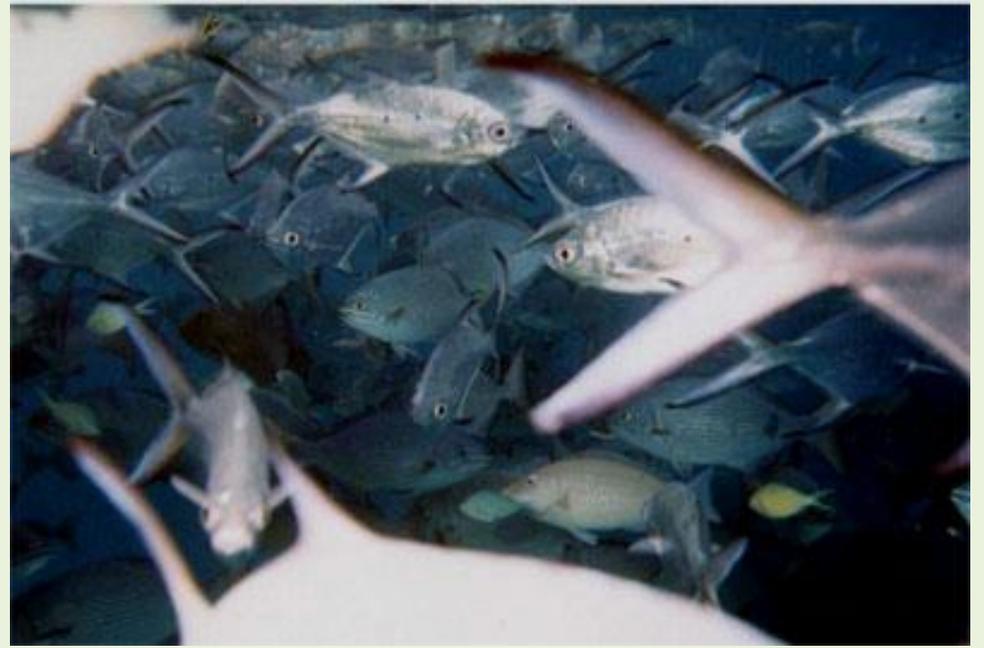
Stingray under the jetty



Another Stingray, also under the jetty



Titan Triggerfish



Wall to wall Three Spot Wrasse at feeding time under jetty



Scorpionfish on top of Coral



Squirrelfish

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Ari Beach 1999

This was also a family holiday but we went for 2 weeks so I managed about 12 dives in total plus a lot of snorkelling. Ari Beach is at the bottom end of the Ari Atoll and much larger than Bathala. It took a good hour to walk all around and while we were there, they were extending the accommodation by building huts on stilts into the lagoon. We went in October and it was much windier than I remember from Bathala, it also rained several times, never unpleasant but obviously normal as all the rooms were equipped with golf umbrellas. We used the speed boat for outward transfer and the Sea Plane (at considerable extra cost for the return trip as it gave extra time for sightseeing in Male. Flights were via Bahrain where we had a 2 hour layover, time to spend a lot of money in the duty free shop.

This period coincided with the El Niño current which raised the water temperature and affected the hard corals so I may not have seen the place at its best. Certainly the pictures (which are not very good) do not reflect anything very exotic in the way of hard corals, though the soft corals seem ok. Most of the dives seemed to be on fairly deep reefs (25-28M) with not so many wall dives or places to fizzle off. I did see sharks on several occasions and a Manta Ray. Though there was a good mix of nationalities amongst the holidaymakers, the majority of the divers were German and my buddy for most of the time was a young lady called Silke. Though the island had a large shallow lagoon it was frankly not too interesting being mainly sand with the odd coral block. It was not really possible to get over the edge of the lagoon onto the fringing reef. Each day they would provide a Dhoni to take snorkellers to a reef about 1/2 mile offshore. This was in about 4 metres of water and whilst there was a good variety of fish life, getting decent pictures was not easy as you had to keep duck diving. Annoyingly, I missed the snorkelling trip on our last full day and thereby missed out on a Whale Shark which decided to swim by!

Overall a good holiday and writing this has made me keen to pay another visit to the Maldives. Really there are 2 obstacles, firstly it's much more expensive than the Red Sea. Secondly, it's a very long flight - 10-15 hours including stops against 5 hours for the Red Sea.

I dived the following sites, some more than once:

Faru Kamambu 22M 57mins	Blue Drop 19M 51 mins	Kudarah Thia 24M 37mins
AA Thila 24M 45mins	Parrots Highway 25M 56mins	Sunset faru 22M 60mins
Bondu Faru 24M 58mins	Maakamdu Faru 19M 60mins	Arches 23M 55mins
Oriental Rocks 25M 57mins	Nenghe Thila 24M 54mins	Kaashi Faru 21M 60mins

Pictures from Ari Beach



Squirrelsfish and Antheas



My buddy Silke Swimming under the Coral Arch



Bannerfish



Black Coral, quite rare and valuable if collected



Blue and Yellow Surgeon Fish. You can see the tangs at the base of the dorsal fin



My buddy Silke from Germany



Clownfish and Anemone



Cornet Fish



Lion Fish on a coral block in the snorkelling Lagoon



Big Fan Corals in a deep gully



File Fish



Small Grouper



Climbing the ladder into the dhoni



Me posing in front of a mangrove tree



On board the dhoni



The jetty at Ari Beach



Moray taken whilst snorkelling of the House Reef



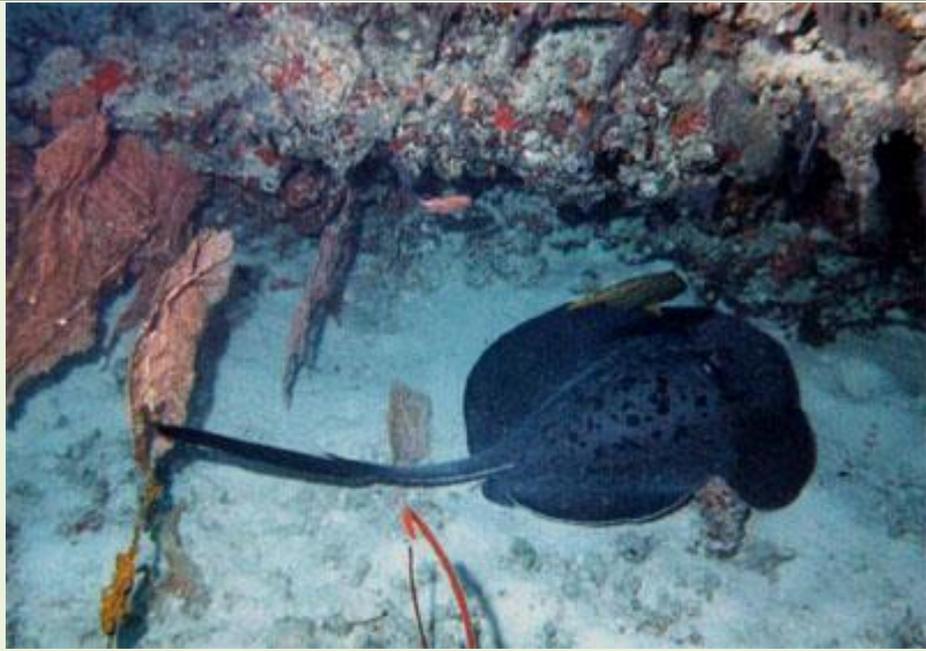
Grey Reef Shark asleep on the bottom



Manta Ray swimming close to surface. we were at 20M or so



Spanish Dancer, lovely purple colour



Stingray



Tulip Coral



Turtle



Nice Soft Coral



The Cafe area at Ari Beach



My daughter Vicky examining the water for fish

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