

Podcast 101: Maldives on a Budget

{INTRO:

ME: I am lying on a sun lounger on a beach in the Maldives. It's very hot, it's very calm, it's very chill. We have music playing in the background. People on jet skis and people swinging on the Isle of Gulhi Swing Instagrammers and this is not the place that I would have expected to have been. It's a very off-brand destination. In fact, V, my friend who you've heard on this podcast before, specifically stated this is possibly the least on-brand destination she's ever seen me go to. But you know what? We all have to, you know, challenge ourselves occasionally and it's been very pleasant. What I'm trying to do here is prove that even places like the Maldives are accessible on a budget so you don't have to stay in a resort to experience what this country has to offer. Although it helps, especially when you travel during Ramadan. But that's another story that we'll come on to later. In the meantime, let me just sit here and chill while I wait for my boat back to Malé.}

{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Normally on my podcasts I spend the first few minutes talking about updates and general housekeeping. However clearly, when you've been away travelling for two weeks and then pretty much immediately set out to create content based on that two weeks, the housekeeping and recent updates is pretty much the entire podcast. I mean, if it helps, the day after I landed, I attended the AGM of the British Guild of Travel Writers but a) that's a braindump for a different podcast as it'll require some introspection to assess my next moves, and b) this podcast *is* one of my next moves on that score anyway. If that sounds mysterious, yes it is, but mainly it's because I still haven't worked out what to do off the back of it, but the important thing is that I have something concrete to push off the back *of*.

My travels in that two weeks were around the southern tip of the region commonly referred to as "South Asia". We had five days in southern India, a country neither of us had ever been to before, just under a week in Sri Lanka, which will be the subject of a future pod, and we need not delve into it right now, and finished off with four nights in that popular backpacking spot, Maldives. It's this last part that I'm concentrating on here. Obviously.

And one might well ask: why on earth is a budget backpacker who likes to travel beyond the brochure, who likes forests and hills and hiking and beer, who can't swim, and who has an anti-bucket list made up at least half by small hot islands, why on earth are they talking about Maldives, a notoriously exclusive and expensive group of islands in the middle of the ocean, a heavily Islamic nation, whose highest natural point is less than twice their own body height?

The short answer is, look, I need 100 countries by the time I'm 50, and we were in Sri Lanka, and the flight over from there is just over an hour, and honestly, I had tempted to go last time I was in Sri Lanka in 2018. I couldn't quite fit it into my schedule, and I have to admit, I didn't consider it to be any real loss. In any case, I'd've only have popped into Malé, the capital, for a quick overnight stop, and not seen anything of the country, A bit like how my first time to Austria was to Vienna and my overall impression was that Austria was a very flat and boring country.

The slightly longer answer is because I was travelling with my polar opposite. While I'm very much a Dryad, Laura is a mermaid and a dolphin, and I thought it would be interesting to go to a destination that very much favours her style of travel for a change. It gave her a chance to be a beach bum for a couple of days and just chill on the beach and hopefully not get sunburned. Spoiler, we failed.

More importantly though, it's not a destination I'd've actively chosen to visit on my own, outwith the capital, so

if I was going to entertain the idea of visiting the country properly, I'd have to do so with someone else. That's the beauty of not travelling solo sometimes; it encourages you to leave your comfort zones. I'll be doing a podcast this year on comfort zones and I'm sure I'll talk about this more then. After all, What's the worst that could happen?

Apart from sunburn, obviously.

By inference too, it was also a place I didn't know a great deal about, because I'd never looked into what was there, and, let's be honest, it's not a country that regularly appears in my circles. It's been so far off my hit list that I knew virtually nothing about it other than where it was, and that it was a lot of small hot islands full of sand.

In addition, when we were looking at the potential trip at the very start of the planning process, Laura had a look at Maldives on a whim and noticed that, in her words, accommodation looked 'strangely affordable', in the sense that we'd always assumed everything in the country was just expensive resorts, so the fact it seemed possible to visit on a budget in the first place hadn't ever really occurred to us. Once we knew that, it made sense to look into it a bit more.

Understandably, given who I am, one of my concerns was whether there'd be enough to keep me interested for my time here, especially as we weren't in a resort with distractions (I'll come onto where we were in a short while). And while on a superficial level I was right to be a little wary - there isn't an awful lot to do on a small hot flat island in the middle of the ocean except just laze on the beach - it was a very pleasant couple of days. Indeed, it probably did me good to switch off, to disassociate, to daydream; after all, it allowed me to prepare this podcast and associated blog posts, meaning I wouldn't be rushed on my return home and I could even get things released on time!

It is exactly, as you imagine, though. I spent the best part of two full days lying on a plastic sun lounger under a parasol, on a sandy beach looking at turquoise water, blinded by an almost overhead sun in a sky with virtually no clouds. It was as hot as you imagine. About the only thing about my time there that was even remotely on-brand was that I was barefoot on the beach and some of the sandy streets. And even that was heat-dependent.

It was, however, all very chill.

{section separation jingle}

I don't know what you know about the country of Maldives and the islands that make it up. I saw a post on my Instagram Explore tab that said someone had asked an AI tool to list countries by cost, and AI had defined it in the 'luxury' category, along with Western Europe and UAE. In addition, Maldives is one of those places that, alongside Mauritius, Seychelles, French Polynesia, and parts of the Caribbean, which were seen as 'if you really want to push the boat out on your honeymoon' type destinations that would occasionally appear on holiday-themed TV shows in my childhood like 'Wish You Were Here ...?', as special options in contrast with their usual over-reliance on resorts on the Costa Brava and the Greek islands. And it is interesting that reactions amongst people we know when we've told them that we were going there have been generally on that theme - some say 'Maldives, wow, that'll be posh' and we have to downplay it, others say 'I didn't know you *could* visit Maldives on a Budget; I'll be interested to see what you create'.

But apart from being a place of perceived luxury for lovers with more money than sense (why yes, I've always been AroAce), it's not a country I ever knew a lot about, not even really where they were, aside from 'somewhere in the Indian Ocean', but the Indian Ocean is a big place. As I say, I'd never looked into the possibility or indeed even viability of visiting, so in terms of my knowledge, it was a reasonable blank space.

Here's a brief logistical and demographic overview, first off:

Maldives is an archipelago of some 1200 islands scattered in 26 atolls (the difference between an atoll and an island is something for GCSE Geography students to discuss, although as an aside the word 'atoll' itself comes from the Maldivian language). The highest point on these islands is, well, the highest natural point is two and a half meters, or about one and a half times my own height, though there's a human-made mound topped by the 8th tee on one of the golf courses that reaches the giddy heights of 5m. Given I feel very out of my depth when it comes to wading even in waist-deep water, you can judge why Maldives is seen as one of the most precarious when it comes to the effects of climate change; it's estimated they're likely to be no more than dangers to

shipping during the lifetime of some of you. That Maldives has a golf course at all is testament to the needs of humans over the practical value of land, given how large most of the island aren't. In fact it has four.

The largest island is the combined Gamu-Maandhoo (two islands connected by a narrow isthmus). It's 7.3 km², which means the largest land mass in the country is slightly bigger than Gibraltar or London Gatwick Airport. The capital, Malé, has an area of slightly more than this (just over 8 km²) but it's spread out over three separate islands, linked by large bridges and small ferries. With a population of just over 110,000, this makes Malé island itself one of the most densely populated islands in the world, and indeed the second most densely populated with a 6-figure population, just behind Navotas Island in Philippines. Across all three islands, Malé city's population is a little over 210,000; the population of Maldives in total is about 515,000. I would say this makes me feel Malé isn't as relatively populous as I'd've expected (or that Maldives isn't as centralised as much as I'd've expected) but honestly, where would they go?

Taken as a whole, Maldives is long and thin. Like Chile, except not. It's about 870 km from north to south, and only 130 km east to west. In addition, the amount of land is remarkably small compared to the area the country covers; about 0.33%. In terms of comparative size, Maldives covers an area the size of Portugal, but is made up of land that covers the size of Malta. To the north of Maldives the island chain continues and becomes the Lakshadweep territory of India. To the south lies the Chagos Islands, what is currently known as the British Indian Ocean Territory, including places like Diego Garcia. That's a whole different ball-game.

As you might expect, it's a very tropical place. Cue stereotypes of desert islands with palm trees and sand. Indeed the equator passes through Maldives, albeit quite far south in the country. There's a dry season and a wet season; one of the chaps in charge of the beach we were on said that during the wet season, Maldives becomes less of a beach destination and more of a surfing one, because the waves pick up quite well. The wet season is longer, traditionally (May to December), and it's interesting to note Malé gets twice as much annual rain as Manchester. Conversely, temperatures don't vary across the year at all - a couple of degrees either side of 28°C or 83°F.

I'm not going to give a potted history of Maldives because there are plenty of other places you can source that from, and if I did it I'd literally be summarising the Wikipedia article and that would be pointless and slightly frustrating for me. All you need know is that people first arrived here around 500 BC, in most of that time it's been heavily influenced by Sri Lanka (slightly more than India, if I'm reading it correctly) and then Arab traders, then it became a British Protectorate for a bit before it became fully independent in July 1965. This explains two things: why the dominant language is English, and why the country is over 98% Islam (Sunni, mostly). This latter point will become very relevant later.

There is, however, a native Maldivian language, and you see plenty of signs written in it. It's called Dhivehi, and it's closely related to Sinhalese (in the same way French is closely related to Spanish). What is very notable about it is the written form. Some languages have full alphabets with separate letters. Some languages are abjads, where the vowels aren't letters and are often merely assumed. Most of the languages of South India use an abugida system where vowels are identified and added as parts of a consonant. Dhivehi is written in the Tanna script which is ... none of these, well, it's sort of an abugida with added vowels. It seems to have picked up bits and pieces from other scripts and mashed them together to create a writing system with no apparent logic to its order of 'letters'. Graphically, most of the letters look like strokes or scratch-marks, and has the feel of bird's tracks in the sand. It's arguably the most unusual writing system I've come across, and I suspect its unfamiliarity and complexity might make it amongst the most difficult for English speakers to get used to.

One thing that we did find interesting is that, sure, Maldives is a big tourist centre - indeed the first resort was opened on one of the islands near Malé as long ago as 1972 - but it's worthwhile noting who the tourists *are*. Maldives' visa policy is pretty liberal. Pretty much the entire world gets either a free visa-on-arrival, or visa-free entry for between 30 and 90 days. Indeed the only country's citizens to have restrictions on entry are, well, remember Maldives is 98% Islamic so it should be pretty obvious. That's not to say there's no admin on arrival; there's a form to fill in online within 96 hours of arrival where you list how long you're staying and where you're staying (the drop-down list of hotels is immense, but it is still a drop-down list) - no-one checked we'd done this, but we did it anyway - and then when you go through immigration they ask you the same things anyway, and you need to tell them all the hotels. It'd be quite difficult to travel truly independently here and I don't know what they'd do if you were visiting a friend rather than staying in a hotel. But that's on-arrival bureaucracy with just answering questions you already know and have the details of, rather than an application to enter.

In addition, Maldives seems to not have many bilateral extradition treaties with other countries. These two facts

means it's a 'safe haven' for citizens of parts of the world that otherwise might have travel limitations. Add in its geographical location – more-or-less easily and quickly accessed from much of Asia – and it means while people come here from all over the world, one nationality in particular stands out.

We heard an awful lot of Russians on the beach. Like, significantly so. Now, we were travelling on a budget and I don't know about the relative cost of living, but I'd assume if you're Russian and have the money to come to Maldives, you probably also have the money to stay in a resort too. And quite a few of the flights from Malé airport were headed in that direction too, so I don't think the number we came across was in any way unusual.

My final general observation is that I don't think there's anything notable to be said for travelling to Maldives while noticeably gender-non-conforming. I mean, obviously, I have purple hair which is unusual in that cultural setting, but it was merely noted and occasionally appreciated; no comments other than 'that's really cool hair' and the like. And no-one said anything about my dungarees, leggings, and long-sleeved plaid shirt combo – indeed I was probably the most covered-up person on the beach and, despite the exuberance of the style, I wonder if people actually appreciated a westerner being considerably more covered than a westerner would normally be in 28 degree heat (feels low-30s).

It must be said it was at the end of a two-week trip and I did have rather more facial hair than normal; so much so that it was beginning to itch and annoy me. So maybe that I looked a bit more obviously masculine than usual might have been something in their eyes too. I don't know.

But at least I didn't get sunburn.

{section separation jingle}

Two of the main considerations when thinking about setting a budget for any kind of travel are the accommodation costs (hostel or hotel? Central location or suburban sprawl? Meals included or not?), and travel costs (how much does it cost to get around? Is the destination walkable? Are sights or subsequent destinations far away? What mode of transport will we need to use?).

However, with Maldives, the first, and possibly only question, is to decide to which islands you're going. In terms of budget, travel and accommodation are synonymous, since your choice of island will be affected by what sort of accommodation you want, how much you're prepared to pay to get there, and whether you want to journey between them or stay on one island for the duration. And this is important to bear in mind, because while there's a lot of information out on the web about budget islands, often it doesn't take into account the whole picture. Case in point: one leading Maldives site suggests the island of Dharavandhoo as a budget destination. Which it might well be. However, it's also nearly 120 km from the main international airport; you can catch a connecting flight for around £200 return or a speedboat (2 hours) for about \$120 return. I know everyone travels on 'a' budget – the word simply means 'a regime of what you can afford to pay' (in the same way as 'diet' simply means 'a regime of eating and drinking', and everyone's on a diet of some description) – but while the average visitor to Maldives might well accept that additional cost as 'just an inevitability of travelling in Maldives', the purpose of this pod is to suggest ways of visiting that don't involve spending excess amounts of money on a 30 minute flight you don't need, between two islands in the country with the lowest average elevation on the planet. But that's another story.

Many of the islands have airports and there are regular flights between the atolls and Malé. To the resort islands there are also seaplanes, but if you're on a strict budget, these won't be on your radar. In addition, all the atolls are served by ferry. The majority of these ferries are actually speedboats operated by a variety of private companies, and their frequency depends on how close the island is to Malé. The closer islands, like Maafushi, have four or five a day, while more distant islands like Dharavandhoo may only have one or two. If times don't align to your plans, there's nothing stopping you from taking a speedboat privately, though at nearly \$200 for a one-way trip even as short as to Maafushi, I'd again suggest these wouldn't be on the radar for the average budget traveller. For some of the larger atolls there are also a series of government-operated ferries that are much cheaper (\$5 to Gulhi and Maafushi, for instance) but they take much longer and might only run once a day. And not at all on Fridays.

In fact that is something to bear in mind. If your trip coincides with a Friday, it's likely you'll be stuck on your chosen island for two nights. So that's another good reason, as a budget traveller, to choose your island carefully, and make sure your hotel is affordable.

To really visit Maldives on a tight budget means taking advantage of these slow government-operated boats, but be aware their primary purpose is to serve the Maldivian population, and therefore operate in effect as commuter services to/from Malé, and generally only serve the islands with a significant local population. This means, for example, the service to Maafushi tends to go *to* Malé in the mornings and depart from Malé in the evenings. Unless you've timed your flights in/out the country to align with this, it means you end up having to spend the best part of two days of your trip in Malé itself, which, I mean, I'll talk about the city later and it's not the worst place you could end up by any means, it's just that it's probably not the reason you're in the country in the first place.

We were restricted with our international flights being at the extreme ends of the day in the wrong direction, so we caught one of the regular speedboats both ways. It was \$25 each for a one-way trip, which took 20 minutes, and it was reliable, timely, comfortable, and very pleasant. It was interesting to see the other islands as we passed, including what I believe to have been the resort island of En'boodhoofinolhu with a whole string of over-water bungalows that cost upwards of £800/night. I'm sure they're very nice, and they're conveniently close to Malé, but still, no. For that price I can get a night at the Ritz Hotel in London, which, you know, has London outside its door. And I'm unlikely to get sunburn.

Anyway. We chose to spend two nights, the best part of three days, on the island of Gulhi. It's only about 20 km south of Malé; indeed you can look north from the beach and clearly make it out on the horizon. It does look a bit weird to be looking at a completely flat watery horizon and then, lo!, buildings, it must be said.

There were a myriad of reasons why we chose Gulhi over the others. First and foremost, it was close to Malé so even though we didn't know the actual cost at that stage, we figured it wouldn't be an expensive or an overly long transfer. We were restricted a bit by time constraints - our flight back home left on the Sunday morning and we couldn't arrive any earlier than the Wednesday evening (we even looked at having one extra night in Sri Lanka and arrive Thursday morning), so we didn't want to venture too far into the atolls, but still wanted to feel like we'd been somewhere other than Malé - enough time to get a feel for the place but not enough for a truly deep dive. We did note a couple of other islands but we didn't really pay them much heed because they were just a bit far out.

Gulhi is only about four miles north of Maafushi, which if you do any research online or in guidebooks, always comes up as *the* budget island. It has a bit of a reputation of being a backpacker hub, even, inasmuch as Maldives *has* backpackers. I guess they're mostly doing what we did, effectively: using Sri Lanka as a base to tick off a country because it's just right there. And we were all set to join them, until we did a hotel search on our booking (dot com) site of choice, and we saw a couple of guesthouses on Gulhi that seemed nicer and cheaper than the ones on Maafushi. In addition, recent reviews of Maafushi hotels suggested the island had become a bit of a building site, with construction and noise being strongly noted. In addition, all Laura really wanted was a beach, she didn't really care about the minutiae, and when she went online the pictures made Gulhi look even nicer than Maafushi was anyway.

The chap who ran the hotel we stayed in in Malé on our last night had a quick thought about the two islands. He said Maafushi is becoming too popular, too crowded, and too full of construction. It's probably a better place to get excursions from, because more people means more choice and more chance of filling the tours, but if all you want is a beach, the one on Gulhi is more or less the same size and considerably less crowded. So it seems a choice had been retrospectively validated by a local in the industry.

What is important about both islands, and also islands like the previously-mentioned Dharavandhoo, is that they're ones where, yes there are provisions for foreigners, indeed it did feel there were more holidaymakers than residents at times, but they are, first and foremost, islands where the Maldivians live. They're not islands with dedicated resorts where tourists stay in isolated accommodations and are waited on hand and foot, with fancy rooms and noted chefs; rather, they're much more 'real', much more interactive, and far less luxurious. In almost any other country this would not be notable in the slightest, because almost everywhere you travel, the idea of walking out your hotel, going round the corner, and finding a small local café, would be no less expected than breathing. But I feel it's notable here because there's a very strong impression that such provision simply does not exist in Maldives; that almost every island is either a resort island or it's kinda effectively off-limits and not touristy at all; that every island is either The Ritz or Kirkby-in-Ashfield.

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So what's it like to visit one of the Maldivian islands that isn't a resort island?

Gulhi is not very big. In fact it's about 400 metres long by 220 metres wide. You can pretty much see everything in the space of a five minute walk. I think it might well be the smallest island I've ever set foot on. We saw people running around it. It would make for a very frustrating ultramarathon. Wikipedia tells me the population of the island is 970, which, and I quote, "includes foreigners", whatever that means.

Arriving at it from the speedboat reflected this - we came into a very small harbour area with a jetty and that was about it. North of the jetty is a small industrial-looking port, and the area around the jetty doesn't feel terribly welcoming. In fact it doesn't really feel anything at all; it's open space with sandy soil and not a lot else. There's a few trees with swing-seats attached, and a 'Welcome to Gulhi' sign. It does get better though, honest.

The streets of the island aren't paved or even really demarcated; they're just passageways of bare earth covered with a light layer of sand. The buildings are mostly square with fairly beige walls (some might call them 'sun-bleached'), and open out straight onto the street with no porch or front yard or anything really. The layout is very much a grid pattern - I don't recall seeing a bend anywhere on the entire island - and while the streets themselves might have names, there's no indication of what they are. Two of the streets had pieces of what could be described as street art, one with a '3' and the other with a '4', which may suggest the third and fourth street. We didn't ask. One thing that was noticeable however was the streetlighting, which was more powerful and more prevalent than the streets in the village near where I currently live in Yorkshire, which, given the lack of cars, made the island feel fairly safe. The island isn't really big enough to have or need motorised transport; the few vehicles we saw were modified three-wheelers (tuk-tuk-like) that served like vans, transporting goods and equipment rather than people. That said, we did also see an ambulance, parked outside the magistrates court, presumably to take people, who otherwise couldn't move, to the harbour to wait for a boat to the hospital on Malé. Given the lack of traffic on the sea, and the fact the hospital is close to one of the ferry ports, this suggests it's quicker for someone on Gulhi to get hospital treatment than it would be for me.

Towards the south end of the island is a large power station, not really hidden behind some palm trees. It's not one of those power stations with large chimneys or anything, but it still subtracts from the aesthetic. It's close to South Beach, which is a small expanse of sand with a handful of palm trees that just feels slightly unloved. There's an 'I heart Gulhi' Instagram spot just off into the sea - a frame which should have a swing but doesn't - so it's either broken or still being constructed.

In fact there was a bit of construction going on here, especially at the south-east end. You can see buildings being built and some construction vehicles around the ragged edges of the island. It's certainly not as prevalent as the reviews of Maafushi made it sound there, and it didn't interfere with our enjoyment of Gulhi, but it's definitely noticeable. It feels like they're building more tourist infrastructure, rather than domestic needs, which should make it an even more hip and happening place just in time for it all to get flooded by the effects of climate change.

The south end also has the police station, the school, the football pitch, and the volleyball court. It also has a very small graveyard and, most usefully, an ATM. I'll talk about money later but it's really useful to have one on such a small island, as it makes things considerably more manageable. You might think there'd be not a lot to buy, but you'd be wrong.

The main driver behind visiting Maldives in general is the beach. Almost everything you see, hear, or read about the country involves white sand, ocean views, and clear turquoise waters. The advantage of going to a resort island is you get it all to yourself. The advantage of going to a more local island is you're not spending £800/night to do so. While there are a number of beaches on Gulhi, including a couple of small areas where the sand of the roads blends into the sand of the shoreline so it's hard to tell where the town ends and the beach starts, the part of the island most tourists will head towards is in the north-east and is called 'Bikini Beach'.

Recall that Maldives is over 98% Islamic. There are signs on the walls of several of the streets in the town saying that swimwear should only be worn on the beach and not on the streets. Bikini Beach is, well it's actually a common thing on the local islands in Maldives, and is a way to create a compromise between local cultural sensibilities and the needs of tourists. It's a walled-off section of the beach where the normal rules of the island do not apply - essentially creating a Westernised enclave. They're all called "Bikini Beach" because it's specifically allowed to wear a bikini on them, as opposed to the other normal beaches where you're obliged to be a bit more covered up. In addition, several other Islamic rules do not apply - for example we travelled during Ramadan and yet it wasn't an issue to eat or drink on the beach during daytimes, even on the Friday. It's

quite weird in a way since it very much gives the vibe that there are two completely different islands here, separated by the wall. Funny how that's often the case. Let it be said though the wall only encompasses the beach itself; all the restaurants and accommodations are on the main body of the island. This is in opposition to the Resort Islands which are generally entirely self-contained complexes and the normal rules do not apply to their entirety.

Bikini Beach on Gulhi is the largest specific expanse of sand on the island, and it's a fairly long but narrow strip of land that slopes steeply down to the sea. It's just about wide enough to fit two rows of sun-loungers with a decent space between the rows, and there's enough length for it to not ever feel too crowded. The beach is patrolled by a gaggle of young adult men from whom you can rent the sun-loungers, buy coconuts or juice, or hire jet-skis or snorkelling equipment. Cash only, hence the usefulness of the ATM. They also often play beach-vibe dance music on loudspeakers; it's never overly loud but it is present, so just be aware of that. I think they're trying to pretend they're in Thailand or the Caribbean or something – and on that note they do have beach parties, or at least evening beach barbecues and bonfires, at least on the Thursday night we were there. Which we didn't go to, partly because why would we, and partly because Laura's not keen on eating fish and most of the food advertised as being on offer was, obviously, sea-based.

The sea is absolutely window-clear. It's also surprisingly shallow to quite a way from the shore, meaning even I could venture out without getting too out of my depth. And there's plenty of fish around, even including small eels, a starfish, and a stingray. We were told that stingray's a regular visitor to the shoreline, to the extent they've even given it a name. Lola, for the record, tho I don't know why.

It being an island on an atoll, there's also coral here. It's not like a huge coral reef or anything, but there's certainly bits of coral in the ocean floor within walking distance of the shoreline. I mean obviously I didn't walk on the coral because I was barefoot and it would have hurt, and in any case you're absolutely not supposed to anyway for environmental reasons, but it was there and I'm incredibly unlikely to be that close to a coral environment very often. This is, however, why you can rent snorkelling equipment. And if you get the jet-skis or jet-boat, you can go way out into the sea and take a better look. I obviously did not do any of that because I don't swim. As an aside, snorkelling is possibly my one swimming regret – not that you even need to be able to swim to just put on a mask and dip your head under – but it's all related, and being able to swim helps, and I think of all the water-based activities I can't do, that's probably the one I'd enjoy.

Apart from that, there's not a lot else to do on the beach other than just lie there and look out to sea. There is one of those swings you see on many an Instagram reel, just in the sea, where you can sit and sway over the sea under an 'I heart Gulhi' sign. We did. Because we're cheesy like that. And because it was kinda fun. Note that this is how you get sunburn, because we're 4°N and it's just on the winter side of the equinox so the sun is pretty much exactly directly overhead. And apart from the dodgy parasols and the occasional overhanging tree, there's no shade anywhere on the beach or the ocean. Wear a hat.

In fact, on that note, on our visit it was it's in the mid 80s Fahrenheit, possibly touching the very low 90s, so we're talking what, a couple of degrees either side of 30 Celsius. Which is not a temperature I'm used to experiencing in early March. And, to be honest, it felt hotter than that. There were a few wispy clouds in the sky, but otherwise it was bright and fiery, especially with the sun reflecting off the sand too. I'd prepared for it by basically wearing an outfit that might have been seen as conservative even for the locals' beaches, at least in length if not in style. Although I did leave my sunglasses in Yorkshire, which was an oversight. Most of the other people on Bikini Beach were wearing the merest whiff of a swimming costume, which is why they all looked like burned ham glistening in the flames.

Another thing you can do though is take tour trips. A couple of these are on or just off Gulhi, including a village tour and a fishing trip. Many though are to other islands. These might include more remote spots for better snorkelling – for example visible in the distance from Bikini Beach is a huge sandbank on which I saw people walking and watching the water. Other trips you can take though are more lively ones, including day-visits to Resort islands where you can laze, eat a wider variety of food, and, importantly for some, drink alcohol. Gulhi, like most of the islands in the chain, is 'dry' – the local café we went to had bottles of beer but they were non-alcoholic ones. I've never found a non-alcoholic beer I've liked that much – to me they all taste a bit like feet. The Resort Islands operate their own system, as there's no local population so the only people on the islands are tourists or hospitality workers, and so are free to do things like offer alcoholic drinks.

Now, obviously, other islands in Maldives will maybe have better coral, more fish, and the like, but again, you get what you pay for and if you're on a budget, what you get here is probably good * enough *. If you really want

to do it properly on a budget though, you'd be better off in Indonesia or somewhere like that. It's just a compromise, very much a compromise.

What we did notice is that people were coming *to* Gulhi on trips from other islands – not necessarily staying long (enough to get the obligatory Instagram shots, at least). Interestingly this was much more common on the Thursday and the Saturday – on both those days we were asked casually by the staffing if we were staying on the island or not. Friday was by far the quietest day on the beach. Because there's a lot fewer travel options available.

Aside from the beach music, the island is really quiet most of the time, and the call-to-prayer is very clearly audible. Otherwise it's just the wind, the waves, the birds, and not much else. It's a very peaceful place to just sit and daydream and switch off from the world.

Then, at sunset, you just amble to the west side of the island and stand on the shoreline and watch the sun set. This close to the equator it's quite a rapid dusk – from the sun disappearing over the horizon to absolute darkness is less than half an hour, and in that time the sky changes colour several times in incredibly vivid hues of orange and lilac and mauve. Add in the silhouettes of the palm trees and it makes for quite a chill and evocative vibe. Remember too you're looking out over a completely flat horizon with nothing in the way – no lights, no buildings, just sky.

{section separation jingle}

Me: Hello :) It's time for a mid-episode break. Half time. Seventh Innings Stretch. That sort of thing. Put the kettle on. Grab a snack. Get comfortable. I'm just here to remind you ways in which you can get in touch and help this podcast out. You probably know this already, but in case you don't:

The best way of supporting this podcast is to join my Patreon; for as little as a pint of beer at Wetherspoons every month, you can get a shoutout on this podcast, get occasional exclusive content, and other benefits. This podcast is going places, and wouldn't you want to say you were there before it was cool! The Patreon link can be found at patreon.com/traveltalesbeyondbrochurepod and it's also in the shownotes.

The second best way is to appear on the pod yourself; if you sign up to my newsletter you'll be able to see what episodes are being planned, and see which you'd like to contribute a voice recording for. It's also a great way to keep in contact if and when the soch meeds undergo a lingering heat death. Newsletters should come out in the first week of each month, and sign-ups can be found at barefoot-backpacker.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe.

I'm a big fan of promoting fellow content creators and podcasters. If you've got a podcast or vlog trailer you'd like to hear featured in this spot, drop it to me and get yourself heard across the world.

Now, on with the show.

{section separation jingle}

Under normal circumstances, accommodation will be a huge expense in Maldives. But if you're listening to this pod, I'm going to assume you're not someone with a couple of thousand pounds to casually throw on a three-night exclusive island trip. This is the advantage of the local islands; they vibe like normal towns, with hotels and guesthouses on the street.

Our two nights on Gulhi were spent in a hotel called Sandy Heaven, which, let's be honest, is quite a pretentious name, but it was a pretty decent hotel. Not terribly large, but given you're going to be spending most of the time on the beach or on an excursion, and you're literally only there to sleep and possibly eat, it's fine.

The room we were in was comfortable, with both aircon and a ceiling fan, though neither of them made the room truly chill. That's not necessarily a bad thing, and we slept pretty well I think, just that it could have been colder. The bathroom was decently-sized and functional, with a large open-plan shower area. There wasn't really a view out the window, but again, you're not really going to be in the room to take advantage of it so that was fine.

The hotel offered breakfast included in the room price, and evening meals as an optional extra. We only had breakfast there, which was a choice of either a series of pancakes with syrup, [whatever option two was], or a Maldivian dish of tuna and rice on a couple of rotis (south Asian circles of bread), plus a tray of fruit (generally sliced apple and orange), and a selection of teas and juices. Definitely something to set you up for the day.

You could arrange boat trips and excursions through the hotel's front desk, or they were happy to provide information and guide you to one of the more specialist operators on the island. I generally felt no-one was really in competition with each other for tourist services – they recommended a rival hotel for food, for instance – and that it's all quite chill even from their side.

I'd say the hotel was in a really convenient location halfway between the jetty and Bikini Beach, but let's be honest, on an island the size of 7 hectares, it would be hard for something to not be in a convenient place. Check-out was at 12, and they were also perfectly happy for us to store our bags there while we stayed on the beach on our last day as our ferry back to Malé wasn't until 4pm.

Either side of the trip to Gulhi we stayed in Malé, both times on Malé island itself. This was because, as I said, of our international flights being at the extremes of the day. Our first night was a last-minute change due to logistics, and we were in the Makhtab Plaza, close to the Airport ferry. It was a very nice hotel, quite posh, much better vibe than a Premier Inn. It had good aircon and the best Wi-Fi we'd experienced since we left India. That was something by the way that was interesting – despite staying in decent enough hotels in Sri Lanka, the Wi-Fi was uniformly dreadful everywhere, either because our room was too far from the routers or because the connection itself was low-bandwidth. But everywhere we stayed in Maldives, the Wi-Fi was brilliant. The hotel also served up a huge buffet breakfast included in the price that had a bit of everything; it was definitely catering more towards I'd say business travellers rather than backpackers, and yet as you'll hear, the hotel itself wasn't too expensive, relatively speaking anyway.

On our last night, before our early plane back, we stayed in a hotel a couple of blocks away, near the national stadium. This was the Tour Inn, which doesn't look much from the outside but occupies the top three floors of an 8-storey tower block. The reception area had its own canary just wandering about on the balcony. We left too early for breakfast, but the room was quite nice; possibly a little small but the bathroom was decent and spacious. The only downside being the electric plug sockets were all in very awkward places – it felt very much as though it was normally a double room but they'd split the beds for us and moved one of them against the wall with all the sockets on.

All these hotels were standard hotels which wouldn't have felt out of place in any other town of equivalent size. While not challenging for truly budget experiences, it must be said Maldives doesn't have a backpacker hostel or equivalent; even Hostelworld only brings up a handful of B&Bs across only five of the islands (including only one on Maafushi, which costs twice as much as the hotel we stayed in on neighbouring Gulhi).

As an aside, Maldives would be a fabulous place to just set up a tent and camp out on a beach, which would be the ultimate in budget travel, but sadly you're not allowed to.

{section separation jingle}

We noticed something interesting about eating on a budget, specifically on Gulhi. So, as you now know, Gulhi is very small, about the size of eight football pitches, and it's flat with sandy soil, so very little really grows there. The main crops seem to be papaya and mango, which I'll come on to in a minute. And coconuts, obviously, because what would a tropical paradise be without the stereotypical coconut. But there's nothing sort of sustainable, which means that you've got to import lots of things like, you know, meat.

But what's interesting is that the restaurant we went into on the island, which I'll come onto in a minute, their menu sold quite a lot of things like noodles and rice and whatnot, with things like chicken and beef and vegetables and seafood. And all the seafood dishes were the consistently the most expensive items on the menu. Despite this being a small island and you can probably walk out from the shore and literally pick up a fish in your hands within a couple of seconds.

I presume it's got a markup *because* it is so fresh and so nice and so sort of ubiquitous. I did have some fishy things while I was there, but they were mixed in with other stuff – that said while we were in the restaurant I did see a couple of other people ordering the whole fish and, to be fair, they were huge beasts. I quite like fish but a whole fish I find just a pain to eat because of all the small bones involved. That said, tuna is quite a common

thing to see on menus here, and tuna's quite a fleshy, bulky fish where that's less of an issue.

I'm calling it a restaurant; it was no bigger than a café and didn't really look like much from the outside – it very much felt like the sort of place locals would go rather than tourists, although most of the people in on our visits were clearly foreigners. It was called 'Dhilakani Café' and it offered both sit-in and takeaway food (and we'd noticed people on Bikini Beach with foil containers that presumably contained the takeaway food from here). It was run by one man, a ball of chaotic energy who pretty much did everything from cook to serve to host. And the portions were epic, much bigger than I expected them to be, and it was darned good food too. Despite the other options on the island, we ate there both nights; I had mixed noodles on the first and a traditional Maldivian fish mix ('valhoamas', sun-dried cured tuna laden with spice) with rice on the second.

We also had probably the best juices we'd had on the entire two-week South Asian trip. A lot of the fruit juices we'd tried had been either fruit-flavoured watery drinks, or smoothies. These were, it felt like he'd taken pieces of fruit, pulp and all, and simply liquidised them, with a bit of added sugar. They were textural, thick, but not a smoothie consistency. I had the mango and Laura had the watermelon.

Now, I say 'despite the other options on the island'; in truth there weren't that many. I assume every hotel and B&B offered an evening food option, and there were a couple of other restaurants around on the island, but the former looked a bit too ... one of them offered a buffet meal type setup, but also had a menu of generic South Asian type food that didn't feel inspiring (and also more expensive), while another one was never open when we walked past it (though we knew it certainly was at some point since the owner was always outside it chilling on a chair when we passed).

There's a lot more eating options in Malé, and covering a wide variety of cuisine. We didn't go to it, but it was interesting the nearest restaurant to the Makhtab Plaza on our first night was, of all things, Mexican. We ended up getting a takeaway shawarma from a small café otherwise filled with locals on the first night, and went to a higher-class Thai restaurant on our last night. Because it was open when we were looking, and everything else was closed because everyone was otherwise breaking their Ramadan fast and we didn't want to eat too late due to our early flight the next day. It was, it must be said, incredibly good Thai food.

{section separation jingle}

Oh, yes, speaking of Ramadan. When we booked our flights in Autumn, it never occurred to us to check when Ramadan was. Not that it would have made much difference to our plans since we were set on visiting anyway, but it was quite on-brand to find out that we'd be visiting an almost-exclusively Islamic country at the end of the first week of their holy month, and all that entails. Bang goes Laura's cocktails on the beach.

As it happens though, it didn't affect our trip too much at all. We'd gone into it with a fear that everything would be closed, especially on the Friday, and that we'd find it difficult to buy food and, more importantly, water, during our stay. It was one reason we made sure that the hotels we stayed in (save for the last night) all offered breakfast included in the price. But in the event we needn't have worried too much.

For one thing, Bikini Beach lives on its own time zone, and, let's be honest, in its own universe. Although they don't offer much, that they were offering at all was a pleasant relief, because every beach day needs a beach coconut. The only noticeable difference on the beach front was, as I say, there were far fewer people there on the Friday, but that's a Friday-and-things-don't-run thing not a Ramadan thing.

It's slightly different in Malé, where the shops and restaurants keep a separate opening schedule purely for Ramadan, which is, obviously, more restrictive than their normal opening hours. One shop we went to in the city, selling surfing and swimming goods, opens on Fridays in Ramadan only between the hours of 9pm and 11pm, which, while the most extreme example we found, didn't feel unduly unusual. What it does do is make it somewhat harder to buy lunch. We had contemplated finding a café to sit in and wait for our ferry to Gulhi on the Thursday morning but it turns out there's only a couple of cafés in the whole of the city that are open daytimes during Ramadan, and they were a decent walk from the jetty.

The other factor to consider is, sunset on our visit was around 6.20pm, and, this close to the equator, that's not going to vary much. Obviously one of the first things that happens at sundown, after the obligatory short prayer session, is the iftar, or 'breaking of the fast'. This is a celebration for all the family and community, but what it does mean is even though it's now culturally appropriate to eat and drink, as a tourist, unless you've been specifically invited to an iftar, you're still going to have to wait to eat at a restaurant or café because everyone's

away at home and therefore nothing's open yet. This is why we ended up at a Thai restaurant, because Thais generally aren't Muslims and therefore they weren't celebrating with the iftar. You can keep to an even tighter budget by not doing this, going back to the hotel to play on the Wi-Fi till 8pm, and then finding somewhere cheaper. We were hungry.

{section separation jingle}

Most people who visit Maldives arrive at the airport and go straight to their resort island. Budget travellers however are more likely, either by design or by pure logistics, to spend some time, probably at least one night, in the capital city of Malé. The city proper is built on one of the islands in the centre of the country; the airport and the suburb of Hulhumalé are built across two others and are connected to the city by long bridges.

Or ferries. There's a regular ferry that runs 24/7 (even including Fridays) between the Airport and Malé, which costs \$1 or 15 Rufiyaa, and takes about 10 minutes. Cash only. Which is inconvenient if you've just arrived from a non-dollar-using country, so just be aware. Check though, if you're staying in a Malé hotel, whether they offer free airport transfers. Ours did.

It must be said there aren't many airports which can be accessed directly via ferry. I know Freetown in Sierra Leone is one, and I've been informed by Amanda Kendle that Kansai Airport in Japan can be reached by boat from Kobe. Perhaps surprisingly, the islands of Orkney tend to have their airports and their ferry jetties some distance apart. Here at Malé though, you walk out of the main entrance of the airport, and the channel separating it from the city is literally the other side of the service road. Whereas other airports would have closely-located bus stops, Malé has quays.

In addition, our flight arrived not long before 6pm so as we were walking out looking for our hotel transfer, we were greeting to an absolutely stunning sunset over the city. It really didn't feel like we were at an international airport at all. We were also eating ice-cream; for some reason the airport has a Dairy Queen franchise, the legitimacy of which is still to be determined, but Laura'd been raving about them for years (they're based in Minnesota, so very much a homeland staple for her) and it was somewhat of a surprise to come across one right there. Chocolate extreme blizzard, for the record, a tub of double chocolate ice cream, chocolate chip chunks and a bit of chocolate brownie that melted in the evening heat long before I'd had a chance to eat it all. Still did, though.

But anyway.

When I first heard about Maldives as a tourist destination, it was maybe three decades ago, maybe four even, and it was always marketed, even then, as being a honeymoon-type destination where you'd land at the airport and be whisked away to your resort island without ever seeing anything of the actual country. Indeed, I have a recollection of in those days, tourists not even being allowed to visit Malé itself anyway; they very much kept tourism and domestic life very separate.

Things have obviously opened up since, but even so much of what I'd heard about Malé was from the few guidebooks and websites to talk about it, and they gave the impression of it being quite a grim, dour, city with not that much to do, and also it not being terribly safe to visit. Kind of a bit like how guidebooks describe Haiti, away from the resort complexes.

I'm here to tell you that this is not true. I'm not saying Malé is a must-see world city, but it is definitely better and more worth some time than the general internet vibe. I mean, it's definitely not overly exciting, nor is it very big, and for sure it's not the reason to come to Maldives (2018 me would have appreciated it, but then as I say 2018 me would only have visited just to tick it off the country list, so probably didn't really care) but it certainly has a lot more life and aesthetic than you might expect from its reputation.

The central island Malé is located on is just under 2 square kilometres (1.952), which makes it smaller than Monaco, and as I said earlier, it is one of the most densely populated islands in the world. The entirety of the island is urban; there's no countryside to speak of at all – which makes it remarkably at odds with most of the other islands in the country.

You might think that that would make Malé some kind of dystopian urban hotpot of noise, chaos, light, smoke, and people. And you'd be absolutely wrong. I mean, sure, there's a heck of a lot of traffic, but the majority of it is motos rather than cars, and therefore just that bit easier to manage. But with regard to the traffic, even the buses, vans, and cars, there's almost no noise and no pollution. Most of the vehicles here seem to be electric,

or at least hybrid, and that makes an incredible difference when you compare it to somewhere like Sri Lanka, where they're ... not. And I guess that makes sense – even in the early days of electric vehicles when the range of them wasn't great, in a city the size of Malé, range isn't an issue so they'd be able to be early adopters. Plus of course, contributing to global emissions wouldn't really be a great vibe for a country as precarious as Maldives. One other note about the traffic, especially coming from Sri Lanka, is the complete absence of TukTuks. In truth they'd feel a bit out of place here.

Public transport in Malé is mainly buses; there's quite a few routes across the cities, including the occasional double-decker which caught me by surprise. Obviously there's also ferries to local and distant islands – on the north side of the island are a series of jetties (at least nine) along a 700m stretch of promenade. The airport and ferries to the other Malé islands go from the far eastern jetty, beyond number nine, while many of the tourist ferries go from jetty one, on the western end, opposite Republic Square.

Republic Square and neighbouring Sultan Park are some of the only green spaces in the city, and they're not very big – they're more like plazas rather than parks. There really is no room on the island for anything that isn't directly related to work, sleep, or eating. Even the weird and unexplainable monument to the 2004 tsunami, which affected Maldives quite a bit (82 deaths, several islands completely flooded by between 2m and 4m high tidal waves), is located in an insalubrious area behind a ferry terminal and near a port. In fact the largest green spaces are in the south of the island and are sports complexes – football, volleyball, and cricket amongst others – and the perimeter of the cricket pitch also serves as an athletic track, making maximal use of available space. There is also a National Stadium, which on our trip was advertising football, but it's really hemmed in on all sides by businesses and housing.

I'm not saying Malé is more Dubai than Delhi, there's no large business district filled to the brim with tall skyscrapers – the tallest building in the city (and indeed the country) is part of the hospital, at 100m, which in comparison would make it the seventh tallest building in Salford – but it certainly gives over a vibe of a slightly chill business city rather than a hectic metropolis serving everyone's needs. Possibly related, but Malé certainly doesn't lack for restaurants. And a lot of different and perhaps unexpected cuisines are represented – as noted earlier, Mexican and Thai were present along with all the other usual suspects. And many seemed to be quite a decent quality too; not backstreet takeaways of the kind you might find in Glasgow. And while we only stayed in two of the hotels, that quite a few hotels came up in our searches, all of which seemed quite similar in terms of price point and facilities, very much suggests as cities go, it's not a bad one to be stuck overnight in.

What I will say though is that there isn't a lot there for the average tourist. Sultan Park has the national museum, but there's very little else apart from that. Even access to the sea is quite limited – the jetties and the port area to the north, and the south side made up of yachts and speedboats, and rocky inlets. I mean obviously if you're coming to Maldives for a beach holiday you're not going to spending it on Malé island anyway, but regardless, the nearest you get, and the easiest access to the water, is a rough and unkempt stone 'beach' on the eastern side near the roadbridge to the airport.

What this means is that, while not the ugly, dour, city Malé used to be, it is very much a city that exists for its residents rather than for tourists, unless those tourists are there on business. But it's definitely more pleasant than you might imagine.

{section separation jingle}

So, with all that in mind, how did we do while travelling on a budget to Maldives.

The first thing we need to impress on you is that all our costs are based on two friends travelling together. So that means twin-bedded rooms in the hotels – which as an aside are relatively tricky to come by, because obviously there's a vibe that Maldives is a place for couples. Although no-one seemed to care that we were an unmarried woman and an administratively man travelling together and sharing rooms.

Overall, we averaged just under £53 per person per day for our stay in Maldives, covering accommodation, food, drink, and travel, though note that includes the Sunday morning where we did nothing more than go to the airport and have a snack. Excluding that, our average for the four days/nights we had works out at a little under £62 per person per day. It also excludes a purchase of goggles Laura made at a shop in Malé (£22.56) on the grounds this was an extraneous item that not every traveller need make, so I'm not counting it in the budget calculation.

Of that, our hotel costs were the major expense. One of the things to bear in mind about Maldives is that the price of accommodation is increased by a series of taxes added to the price and payable on check-in, regardless of if you've pre-paid online for the actual hotel or not. And these aren't small taxes either - our first hotel in Malé, the Makhtab Plaza, cost a total of £117 for a twin room with breakfast, of which about £30 was extra taxes, including an 'environment fee' of £12. And this was for one night, remember.

The other two hotels we stayed in were a bit cheaper; the Sandy Heaven on Gulhi was just under £40/night in total, for a twin room with breakfast, and the Tour Inn back in Malé, which was £70/night for a twin room, no idea about breakfast as we left far too early to have taken advantage of it anyway. You can tell the hotels in Malé were more expensive than the hotel on Gulhi - budget travellers might want to take that into account when they're plotting a route, though you're probably going to have to have one night in Malé anyway based on your flights, unless I guess you visit as a side-quest from Sri Lanka, where there seem to be regular flights throughout the day.

Our food at the Dhilakani Café on Gulhi came to around £7.50 to £8 per person; this was for a meal and two drinks (fruit juice). The more touristy restaurant down the street from our hotel would have worked out at maybe a pound or two more. On our first night in Malé, the street shawarma and drink we had was a shade under £5, while our Thai restaurant on the last night was heading towards £20 including a drink. I need to reiterate it was some of the nicest Thai food we'd had, but if you're really wanting to keep to a strict budget you could just do another shawarma instead. And not time your meals to coincide with iftar during Ramadan. Aside from that, the coconut at the beach was £3.50, large bottles of water were under a quid, and airport food was surprisingly reasonable.

As already noted, the speedboat to/from Gulhi was \$25, or just under £20 each one/way, while the ferry to the airport was less than a pound. In addition, the beach cost £27 for two people for three days' worth of sun-lounger time, so that's £4.50 per person per day.

Clearly, you can save on quite a lot of this if you tried - taking the government boats, spending less time in Malé, eating in local cafés more - but you'd be hard-pushed to save much money on the accommodation to be honest. That said, at an absolute minimum, you could probably take a trip to Maldives with a friend and spend about £40 per person per day. It just mightn't be terribly enjoyable. I'd say though you definitely couldn't do this as a solo traveller - prices tend to be per room rather than per person and if you're only one person they won't knock too much off the price.

One might also argue in fact that while you can travel Maldives on a strict budget, why would you? For instance, while of course everyone thinks of Maldives as being a place of expensive exclusive resorts, note that if the hotels in Malé are pushing £80-£100/night, you can get deals pretty easily for island resorts close to Malé for not much more than double that, and if you're the sort of person who's contemplating going to Maldives, it's likely you're not a dirt-cheap backpacker anyway. We only noticed this after we got back home, I may add.

I think I also should say a little bit about money itself in the Maldives. The official currency is the Maldivian Rufiyaa, but while not fixed to the US Dollar it is loosely tied to it. That, plus the reliance on the tourism economy, means that many prices are also quoted in US Dollars, and indeed often, certainly on the resort islands, you can even pay in Dollars. You just might get Rufiyaa in exchange. That said, if you're listening to this pod, you're not necessarily going to be the sort of person who is just going to seaplane off to an exclusive resort. In addition, there are ATMs which dispense Dollars should you prefer to do that. Note that Rufiyaa is one of those currencies that's almost impossible to exchange outside the country, so their use of Dollars could be a benefit to many. That said, on the local islands and in the smaller shops and restaurants in Malé, Rufiyaa is very much the preferred currency, and in cash too, so unless your holiday is entirely at a resort, you'll still need it - hence why it's really useful to stay on an island with an ATM. Just be wary of the admin fees for using them - there's a balance to be had between having too little money and keep having to use the ATM, and having too much money and not be able to spend it. That all said, card payments are accepted pretty much everywhere in Malé, on the resort islands, and at hotels on the local islands.

In summary, my first tip when thinking about a budget trip to Maldives is: take a map, draw a small circle around Malé, and stay within that circle.

{end pod jingle}

Well, that's about all for this episode. Join me next time for another adventure Beyond The Brochure. Until

then, everyone's free to wear sunscreen, and you should, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, tell your friends that I rocked your socks. If you wear socks when listening to my pod; that's your call not mine. And don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Show-notes are available on my website: barefoot-backpacker.com.

Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}