



**ESCAPE**  
BRINGING SEA TRANSPORT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

# GULHI

Kaafu Atoll • South Male Atoll • Maldives

*Oldest Shipyard • Pristine Bikini Beach • Authentic Fishing Village*

■ 21 km from Airport

■ ~900 Residents

■ Oldest Dockyard

■ Pristine & Uncrowded

■ Unique: Oldest Active Shipyard in the Maldives • Quiet Alternative to Maafushi

Complete Tourist Travel Guide • 2025 / 2026 Edition

KAAFU ATOLL • REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES • INDIAN OCEAN

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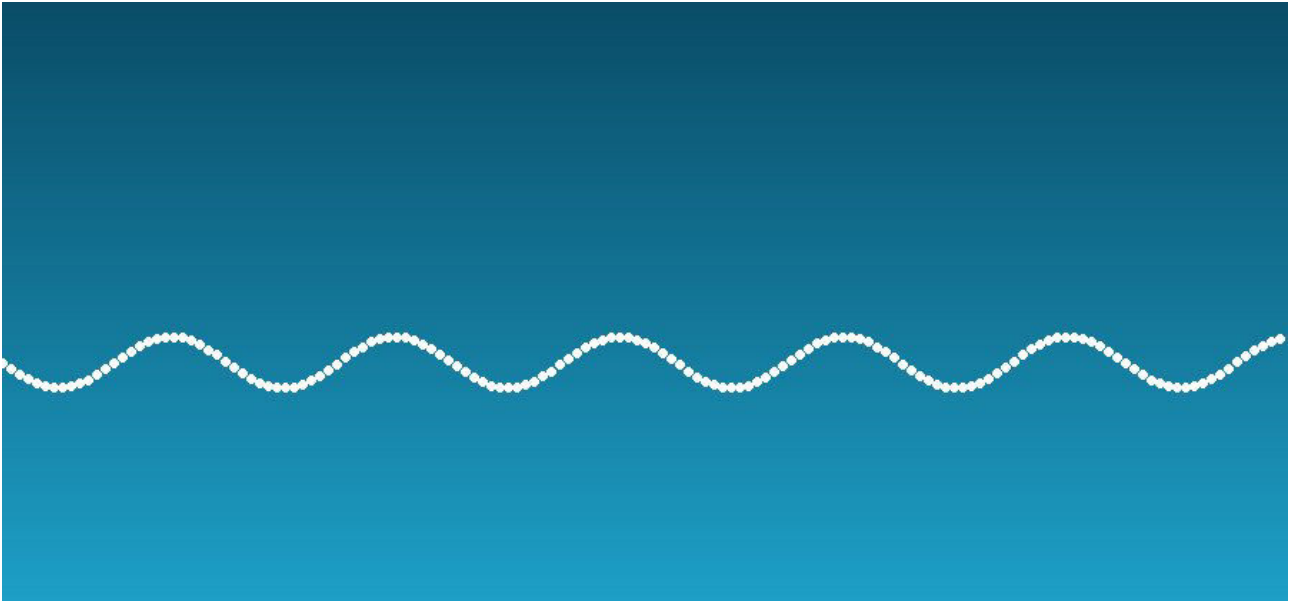
*Your complete guide to Gulhi Island*

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# 1. WELCOME TO GULHI

*The quiet gem of South Male Atoll*

Nestled in the southern part of Kaafu Atoll, just 21 kilometres south of Velana International Airport, Gulhi (officially K. Gulhi) is one of the Maldives' best-kept secrets. With a tight-knit community of around 900 warm and welcoming residents, this tiny island — measuring just 670 metres by 230 metres — offers everything the Maldives is famous for: turquoise lagoons, powder-white sand, vibrant coral reefs, and genuine Maldivian hospitality — without the crowds.



*Gulhi Island from above — turquoise lagoon, white sand beaches, and the famous northern shipyard visible along the shore.*

What makes Gulhi truly special is its combination of accessibility and authenticity. Situated just 8 km from the more famous Maafushi and a short 30-minute speedboat from the airport, Gulhi is perfectly placed for short stays, day trips, or as a serene base for exploring South Male Atoll. The island hosts the oldest active shipyard in the Maldives on its northern shore — a working heritage site where traditional dhoni boats are still built and repaired by hand using centuries-old techniques.

Prior to the mid-1980s when President Gayoom's government restricted tourism to resort islands, Gulhi was actually one of the Maldives' most popular local island destinations, hosting hundreds of visitors in local homes and guesthouses. The island has a long, proud tradition of welcoming outsiders, and that warmth continues today as guesthouse tourism has reopened Gulhi to the world.

## ■ Pro Tip

Gulhi is the perfect alternative to busy Maafushi for travellers seeking a more serene, uncrowded local island experience. Close enough for a day trip, beautiful enough to deserve a multi-night stay.

## 2. ESSENTIAL FACTS

*Everything you need to know at a glance*

<b>21 km</b>	<b>~900</b>	<b>670 m</b>	<b>30 min</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Oldest</b>
From Airport	Residents	Island Length	Speedboat to Airport	PADI Dive Centres	Shipyards in Maldives

FACT	DETAIL
<b>Location</b>	Kaafu Atoll (South Male Atoll), Maldives
<b>Distance</b>	21 km south of Velana International Airport; 8 km from Maafushi
<b>Island Size</b>	670 m x 230 m (walkable in 20 minutes)
<b>Population</b>	~900 residents — one of the smallest in Kaafu Atoll
<b>Language</b>	Dhivehi; English at guesthouses
<b>Currency</b>	MVR (Rufiyaa); USD accepted at guesthouses
<b>ATM</b>	None on island — bring cash from Male or Maafushi
<b>Ferry</b>	MTCC Route 311 from Villingili Terminal, Male — departs 3 PM (not Fri/Mon); arrives
<b>Speedboat</b>	Tropic Xpress: departs Male 12:30 & 4:45 PM (~25-30 min, \$25-30/pp)
<b>Beaches</b>	North Beach (conservative/local); South Bikini Beach (tourist swimwear OK)
<b>Historic Site</b>	Oldest active shipyard in the Maldives — North shore
<b>Surf</b>	Gulhi Reef break accessible from beach; Twin Peaks & Quarters by boat
<b>Dive Centres</b>	Two PADI centres: Gulhi Adventure Diving Centre
<b>Nearest Neighbour</b>	Maafushi (8 km); Guraidhoo (nearby); Male (21 km)
<b>Best For</b>	Quiet authentic experience, families, couples, surfers, divers, day-trippers

### 3. GETTING THERE

*Transport options from Male and the airport*

Gulhi is one of the most easily accessible local islands in the Maldives. From Velana International Airport, a direct speedboat ride takes just 25–30 minutes — making it ideal for short stays or travellers wanting to minimize transfer time.

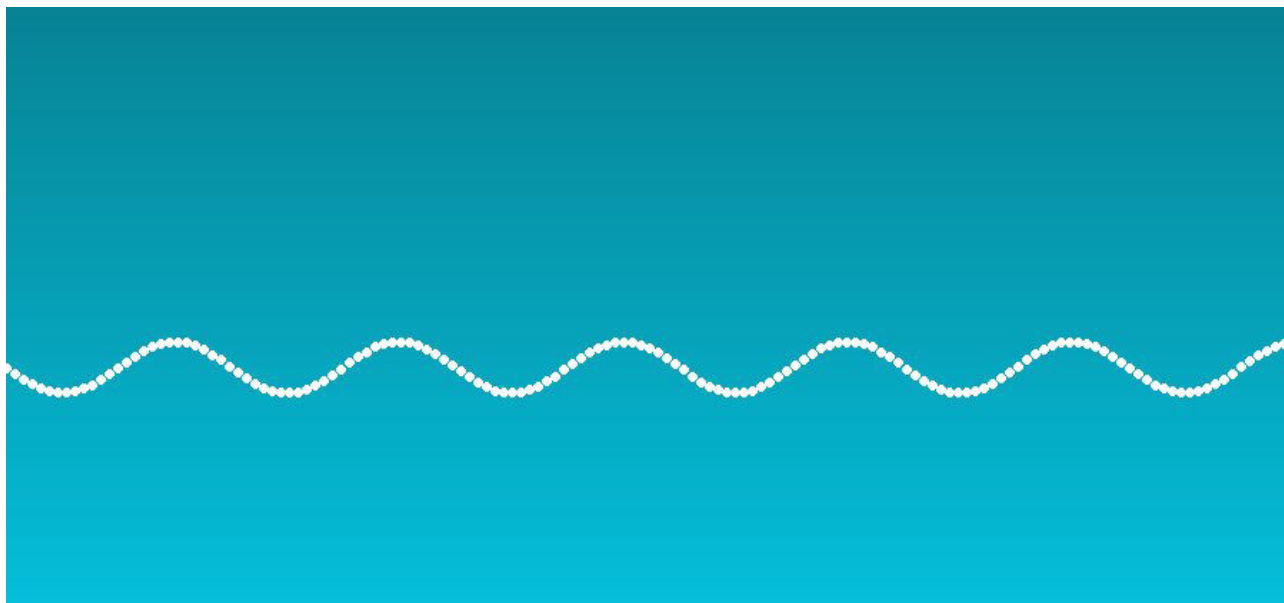
Transport	Duration	Cost	Notes
<b>Public Ferry (MTCC Route 311)</b>	~75 min	MVR 35 (~\$2.50)	From Villingili Terminal, Male. Departs 3 PM daily except Fri & Mon. Gulhi is F
<b>Speedboat (Tropic Xpress)</b>	~25-30 min	\$25-30/pp	Scheduled departures Male 12:30 & 4:45 PM. From Gulhi: 7:45 AM & 1:30 PM
<b>Private Speedboat</b>	~25 min	\$60-100 total	Flexible timing; arrange via guesthouse. Best for groups/families.
<b>From Maafushi</b>	~10 min	\$10-15/pp	Short hop by speedboat; or ~30 min public ferry. Easy day trip connection.

#### ■ ■ Pro Tip

**IMPORTANT:** No ATM on Gulhi. Stock cash (USD or MVR) in Male before travelling. The closest ATM is in Maafushi. Some guesthouses and restaurants accept credit cards but don't rely on it. Ferry does NOT run Fridays or Mondays — plan accordingly.

## 4. BEACHES OF GULHI

*Pristine sands, crystal lagoons, and bikini beach*



*Gulhi's Bikini Beach — South Beach — is consistently rated among the most beautiful local island beaches in South Male Atoll: calm, clear, quiet, and pristine.*

### South Beach — Bikini Beach

The jewel of Gulhi, South Beach is the designated tourist beach where visitors can wear swimwear and sunbathe freely. Consistently praised as one of the most beautiful bikini beaches in South Male Atoll, it features impossibly clear, calm, shallow water with no waves — perfect for swimming at all levels. Sun loungers and umbrellas are available free of charge. The house reef is accessible from this beach — snorkel equipment available from nearby shops.

### North Beach — Local Beach

The northern shore is a beautiful stretch of white sand used by the local community. Visitors are welcome but must dress modestly (cover shoulders and thighs). This beach offers stunning views of the ocean and the working shipyard nearby. Best for peaceful walks, photography, and observing daily island life. The waters can be slightly rougher here than the sheltered south side.

### House Reef

The house reef starts approximately 200 metres from the South Beach shore. Swim out independently (mask and fins recommended) or take a guided tour to encounter colourful reef fish, sea turtles, eagle rays, and occasional blacktip reef sharks. Morning snorkelling offers the best visibility.

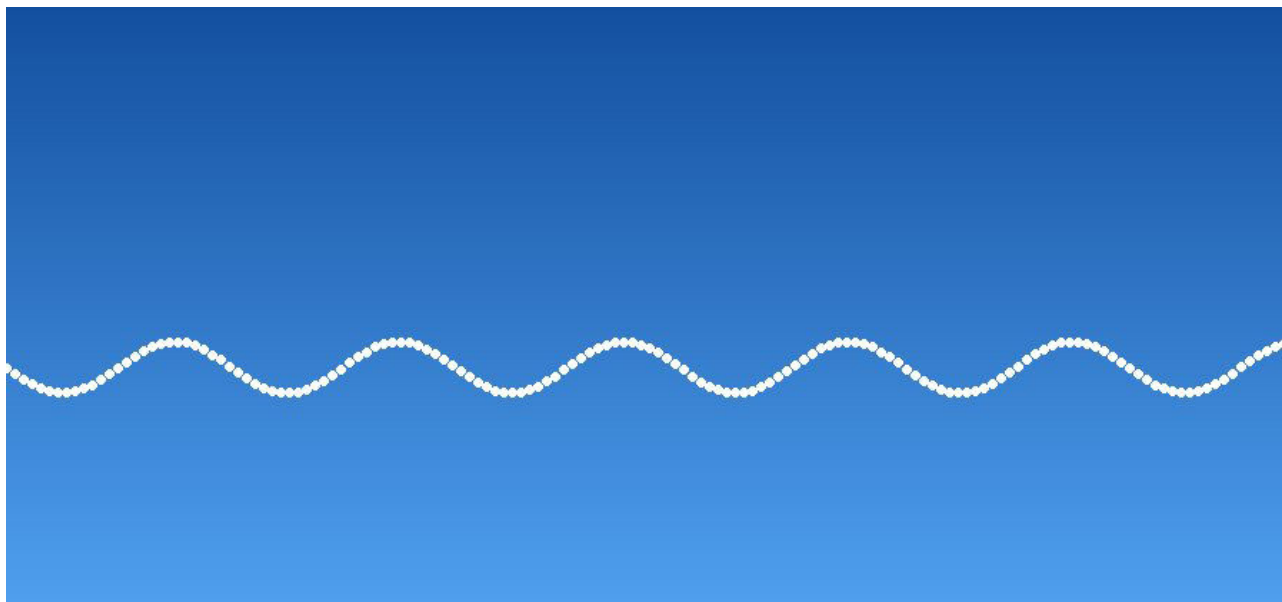
**■ ■ Pro Tip**

Gulhi's bikini beach is notably quieter than Maafushi's — if you want a peaceful, uncrowded beach day in the Maldives without sharing it with 200 other tourists, Gulhi is your answer. Free sun loungers are a bonus!

## 5. SURFING

*Quick access to South Male Atoll's best breaks*

Gulhi's position in South Male Atoll places it within easy reach of some of the finest surf breaks in the Maldives. The island is a natural surf base for those who want quick boat access to world-class waves without paying resort prices.



*South Male Atoll surf breaks — accessible by short boat rides from Gulhi's harbour.*

### ■ **Gulhi Reef Break [Level: Beginner-Intermediate | Season: Apr-Oct]**

The island's own reef break, accessible directly from the beach on a surfboard. A great option for warm-up sessions or beginner surfers getting comfortable on reef breaks. Consistent small-to-medium waves during the southwest monsoon season.

### ■ **Twin Peaks [Level: Intermediate-Advanced | Season: Apr-Oct]**

One of South Male Atoll's most celebrated surf spots, accessible by a short boat ride from Gulhi. A powerful, fun wave suitable for intermediate and advanced surfers seeking quality rides in a pristine setting.

### ■ **Quarters [Level: Beginner-Intermediate | Season: Apr-Oct]**

A more forgiving wave compared to Twin Peaks, Quarters is ideal for surfers progressing from beach breaks to reef breaks. Consistent and well-shaped during the monsoon season.

### ■ **Kandooma Right (nearby) [Level: Intermediate-Advanced | Season: Apr-Oct]**

The legendary Kandooma Right — near Guraidhoo — is also accessible by boat from Gulhi for surfers willing to travel 20-30 minutes. One of the Maldives' finest right-handers with waves up to 8+ feet on peak swells.

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### ■ **Tiger Stripes (nearby) [Level: Advanced | Season: May-Sep]**

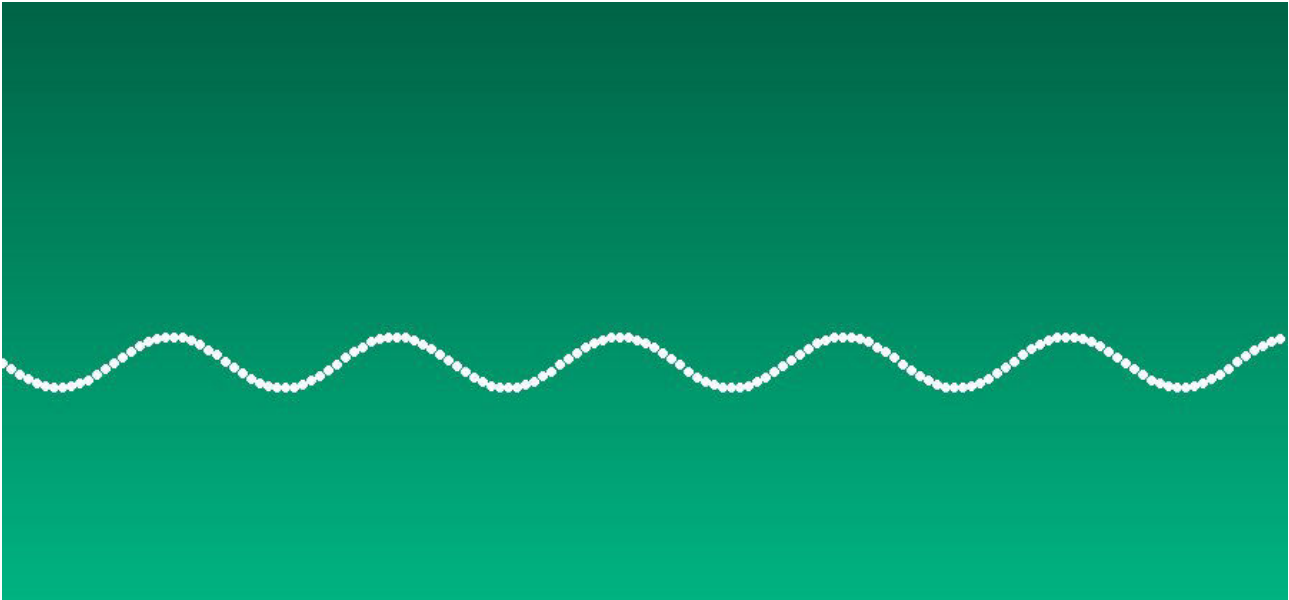
A powerful, fast-breaking wave near the Guraidhoo channel. Suitable for experienced surfers only. Accessible by boat from Gulhi on surfari excursions organised through local operators.

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## 6. DIVING & SNORKELLING

*Two PADI centres and world-class South Male sites*

Gulhi has two PADI-certified dive centres offering courses, guided dives, and snorkelling excursions to the exceptional dive sites of South Male Atoll. The island's Adventure Diving Centre runs regular trips to sites that rank among the best in the entire Maldives.



*The vibrant coral reefs of South Male Atoll — easily accessible from Gulhi Island.*

### Premier Nearby Dive Sites

#### ● **Kandooma Caves [10-25 m | All levels]**

Enormous cave systems, among the largest in South Male Atoll. Yellow sponges, seafans, giant moray eels, groupers, and green turtles. A stunning dive in sheltered conditions.

#### ● **Kuda Giri Wreck [18-30 m | Intermediate]**

A small wreck embedded with colourful sponges, tube corals, and orange cup corals. Home to batfish, glassfish, gobies, triggerfish, and occasional Napoleon wrasse. Accessible from Gulhi.

#### ● **Embudu Kandu [15-30 m | Intermediate-Advanced]**

Thrilling channel drift dive featuring eagle rays, grey reef sharks, and diverse reef fish. One of the classic South Male Atoll drift experiences.

#### ● **Lhosfushi Corner (Guraidhoo Kandu) [10-35 m | Intermediate-Advanced]**

World-renowned channel system offering encounters with grey reef sharks, Napoleon wrasse, and enormous schools of fusiliers in powerful current.

### ● **Guraidhoo Kandu [10-35 m | Advanced]**

The iconic Guraidhoo channel system — complex topography, pelagic-filled drift dives, caves, and walls draped in soft corals. One of the Maldives' finest.

### ● **House Reef Snorkel [3-15 m | All levels]**

Accessible directly from South Beach; colourful reef fish, turtles, and reef sharks in clear shallow water. Perfect for beginners and families.

#### ■ **Pro Tip**

Book dive trips in advance through your guesthouse or Gulhi Adventure Diving Centre. Combination dive-and-snorkel day trips to multiple South Male Atoll sites offer excellent value and variety.

## 7. MARINE LIFE

*What you will encounter around Gulhi*

### ■ Sharks

- Blacktip Reef Shark — visible in shallow water near the house reef
- Grey Reef Shark — channel dive sites like Embudu and Guraidhoo Kandu
- Whitetip Reef Shark — cleaning stations at nearby dive sites
- Nurse Shark — sandy channel floors
- Whale Shark — seasonal sightings near outer reefs (Nov-Apr)

### ■ Sea Turtles

- Green Sea Turtle — cave sites and coral gardens
- Hawksbill Turtle — house reef and snorkel spots near shore

### ■ Rays & Dolphins

- Eagle Ray — house reef and channel dives
- Stingray — sandy floor areas near dive sites
- Manta Ray — seasonal at nearby manta points
- Spinner Dolphin — sunset dolphin cruise excursions

### ■ Reef Fish

- Napoleon Wrasse — wreck and channel sites
- Schools of Fusiliers & Snappers — all channel dives
- Moray Eels — Kandooma Caves and all overhangs
- Barracuda & Giant Trevally — channel hunting grounds
- Clownfish, Parrotfish, Triggerfish, Angelfish — house reef

#### ■ Pro Tip

Spinner dolphins are incredibly common in South Male Atoll — evening dolphin cruises from Gulhi offer near-guaranteed sightings of pods playing in the wake of the boat as the sun sets over the atoll.

## 8. EXCURSIONS & DAY TRIPS

*Explore South Male Atoll from Gulhi*

### ◆ Dolphin Watching Sunset Cruise

2 hrs | \$30-45/pp

Board a dhow as the sun sets over the atoll. Spinner dolphins regularly race alongside; stunning golden-hour views over the surrounding islands.

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### ◆ Sandbank Picnic & Snorkel

Half day | \$45-60/pp

Boat trip to a pristine sandbank for swimming, snorkelling over coral gardens, and a picnic lunch. One of Gulhi's most magical excursions.

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### ◆ Maafushi Day Trip

Half day | \$10-15/pp

Short hop to Maafushi (8 km, 10 min) for a day of water sports, restaurants, and the bigger island's wider facilities. Easy return by evening.

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### ◆ Guraidhoo Day Trip

Half day | \$15-25/pp

Visit neighbouring Guraidhoo for its unique Lhosfushi bridge island, pier shark feeding, and famous evening atmosphere.

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### ◆ Traditional Night Fishing

2-3 hrs | \$30-45/pp

Fish using traditional Maldivian hand lines under a star-lit sky. Often accompanied by bioluminescent plankton glowing in the dark water.

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### ◆ Whale Shark Snorkel

Full day | \$80-120/pp

Seasonal (best Nov-Apr) excursion to outer reef whale shark aggregation areas. Swimming with the world's largest fish is a bucket-list experience.

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### ◆ Island Hopping Tour

Full day | \$50-70/pp

Visit 3-4 islands in South Male Atoll including uninhabited islets and sandbars. A comprehensive way to experience the atoll's diversity.

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### ◆ Surfari to Twin Peaks/Quarters

Half day | \$35-50/pp

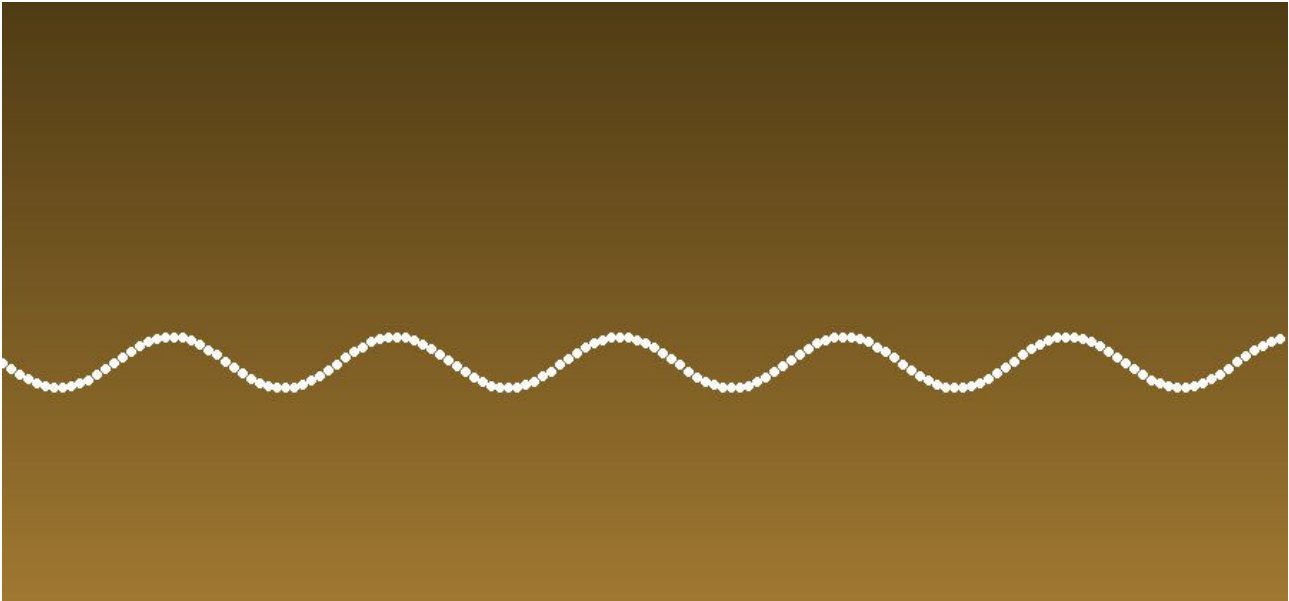
Boat trip to the nearby surf breaks for a guided surf session. Boards and instruction available for beginners.

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## 9. THE HISTORIC SHIPYARD

*The oldest active dockyard in the Maldives*

One of Gulhi's most extraordinary and unique attractions is its historic shipyard on the northern shore — recognised as the oldest active dockyard in the entire Maldives. This remarkable working heritage site has been in continuous operation for centuries, and remains one of the most important boat-building and repair facilities in the country.



*The oldest active shipyard in the Maldives — traditional dhoni boats being built and repaired at Gulhi's northern shore.*

The reason for Gulhi's enduring importance as a dockyard is its strategic location. Situated close to Malé, the capital, many of the seafaring vessels of the Maldives have historically used Gulhi's facilities for maintenance and repair. Around eight fishing vessels operating from the island specialise in yellowfin tuna fishery, each with crews of 15–20 people who regularly return to Gulhi's shipyard.

Visiting the shipyard is a fascinating and genuinely moving experience — watching skilled Maldivian craftsmen shape timber by hand, apply traditional caulking, and paint the distinctive colourful hulls of the dhoni boats using the same methods their grandfathers used. The craftsmen are generally welcoming of respectful visitors who take a genuine interest in their work.

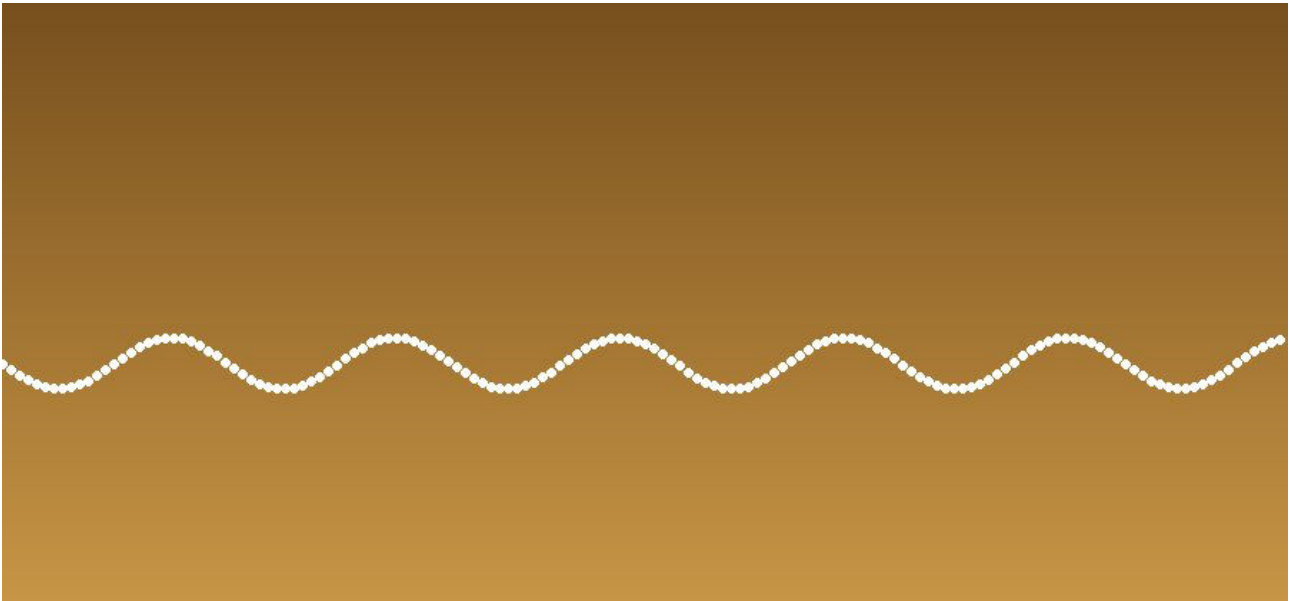
Word 'Gulhi' itself refers to a small earthen clay pot that Maldivians historically used to carry water on dhoni boats — a nod to the island's long maritime heritage.

### ■ Pro Tip

Visit the shipyard in the morning when the craftsmen are most active. Ask your guesthouse host to accompany you as a cultural guide — they can translate and provide context that turns a sightseeing visit into a genuine cultural experience.

## 10. LOCAL CULTURE & TRADITIONS

*Authentic Maldivian island life*



*Gulhi's colourful painted houses and sandy lanes offer a genuine window into everyday Maldivian island life.*

### A Welcoming Community

Gulhi has a long tradition of welcoming visitors — the island was one of the first in the Maldives to host tourist bed-and-breakfast stays in the 1980s. Today that welcoming spirit continues: locals often stop to chat, share stories, and offer genuine Maldivian hospitality. A smile and the greeting 'Assalaam Alaikum' goes a long way.

### Fishing Heritage

The main economic activity is fishing — particularly yellowfin tuna. Watching the fishing dhonis return in the early morning with their catch, and seeing the fish cleaned and prepared on the harbour, is one of the most authentic Maldivian experiences you can have. The entire community is shaped by the rhythms of the sea.

### Islamic Daily Life

Five daily prayers shape the island's rhythm. Friday is the weekly holy day. Visitors are welcomed with warmth but asked to dress modestly in village areas (outside the tourist beach), avoid public displays of affection, and be mindful during prayer times. Modest and respectful behaviour is reciprocated with exceptional warmth.

### Island Infrastructure

Despite its small size, Gulhi has a primary school, mosque, bashi playground, several souvenir shops, and a small health facility. No motorised vehicles operate on the island — it is entirely

walkable, adding to its peaceful charm.

## 11. FOOD & DINING GUIDE

*Fresh seafood and local flavours*

Gulhi's food scene is small but authentic — fresh tuna and reef fish dominate menus, guesthouse cooks prepare home-style Maldivian dishes with genuine care, and the local teahouses serve snacks and sweet tea in a relaxed community atmosphere. This is honest island cooking at its best.

**Mas Huni:** The Maldivian breakfast classic — shredded smoked tuna with grated coconut, chilli, and lime, served with roshi flatbread. Gulhi's version is made with the freshest locally-caught tuna.

**Grilled Tuna & Reef Fish:** Yellowfin tuna and fresh reef fish grilled simply over charcoal — Gulhi's fishing fleet ensures the freshest possible ingredients. Served with rice, coconut-based condiments, and local salads.

**Garudhiya:** Clear tuna broth with rice, lime, and chilli — the Maldivian soul food that fishermen have eaten for centuries. Simple, warming, and deeply satisfying.

**Short Eats (Hedhikaa):** Local snack pastries — masroshi (tuna roshi), baigiya (puff pastries), and kulhi boakibaa (fish cakes) — served at the island's teahouse with sweet tea. Cheap, delicious, and utterly Maldivian.

**Guesthouse BBQ Nights:** Many guesthouses arrange beachside BBQ evenings with fresh grilled seafood and local sides — some of the most enjoyable dining experiences Gulhi has to offer.

### ■ Pro Tip

Like all Maldivian local islands, Gulhi does not sell alcohol. No floating bar operates here either — Gulhi is a genuinely dry island. Visit Maafushi (8 km, 10 min) if you require licensed premises.

## 12. WHERE TO STAY

*Guesthouses for every budget*

Gulhi currently has several guesthouses with more under development. While the selection is smaller than Maafushi's 55+ options, the guesthouses here offer superb personal service, a genuinely local atmosphere, and excellent value.

Category	Price/Night	What to Expect
<b>Budget Guesthouses</b>	\$40-70 USD	Clean rooms, A/C, WiFi, breakfast often included. Ideal for backpackers and solo travellers.
<b>Mid-Range</b>	\$70-130 USD	En-suite bathrooms, sea views possible, in-house meals, tour desk, warm family-run atmosphere.
<b>Boutique/Beach</b>	\$130-250 USD	Beachfront access, private feel, full dining and excursion services included. Growing in popularity.

### Key Guesthouses

- **Arrival Beach & Spa** — Popular boutique property with beach access, spa services, and two restaurants. Highly rated for service.
- **Gulhi Guesthouse** — Locally-owned family guesthouse; excellent home-cooked food and warm personalised hospitality.
- **Adventure Dive & Stay** — Specialist dive-and-stay guesthouse with direct links to the PADI dive centre. Best for divers.
- **Local Family Stays** — Several family-run guesthouses offer the most authentic experience; book via guesthouse booking sites.

## 13. PRACTICAL TRAVEL TIPS

*Everything for a smooth visit to Gulhi*

### ■ Money

- No ATM on Gulhi — bring USD or MVR from Male. Nearest ATM in Maafushi. Some guesthouses accept card. Budget \$50-80/day for comfortable stay with activities.

### ■ Connectivity

- Free WiFi at all guesthouses. Dhiraagu or Ooredoo SIM from Male gives good 4G coverage. Power: 230V, UK-style plugs.

### ■ Health

- Small health facility on island. Nearest full hospital in Male (~30 min speedboat). Bring personal medications. Use reef-safe sunscreen only.

### ■ Visa

- Free 30-day visa on arrival at Velana Airport for all nationalities. No vaccinations required.

### ■ Island Life

- No cars — walkable in 20 minutes. Rent a bicycle from guesthouse to explore at a leisurely pace. No alcohol on island. Dress modestly outside beach areas.

## 14. BEST TIME TO VISIT

*Month by month guide*

Month	Weather	Diving	Surfing	Notes
<b>Jan-Feb</b>	Sunny, dry	Excellent (30m)	Flat	Peak season; best conditions overall
<b>Mar-Apr</b>	Warm, sunny	Very Good	Building	Great weather; slightly fewer crowds
<b>May-Jun</b>	Transition	Good	Excellent	Surf season starts; dive prices drop
<b>Jul-Aug</b>	Wet, warm	Fair	Excellent	Best surf; whale sharks possible
<b>Sep-Oct</b>	Wet, improving	Fair-Good	Good	Quietest; best budget travel
<b>Nov-Dec</b>	Dry starts	Very Good-Excellent	Flat	Dive season returns; great value Nov

Gulhi — small in size, enormous in charm. Come for the silence, the shipyard, the bikini beach, and leave with the warmth of genuine Maldivian hospitality. ■ ■ ■ ■

Safe travels — Gulhi welcomes you! ■ ■